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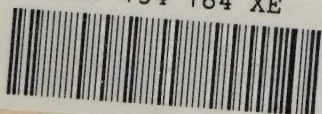
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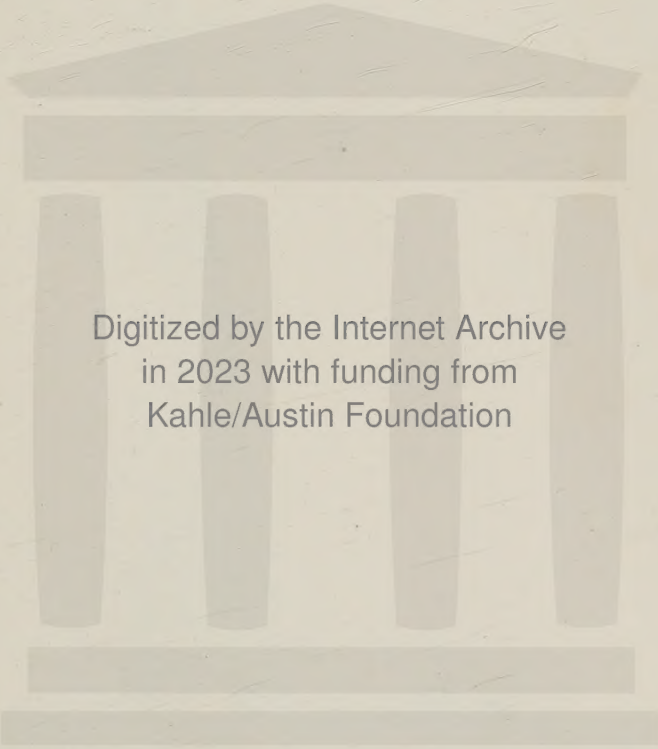
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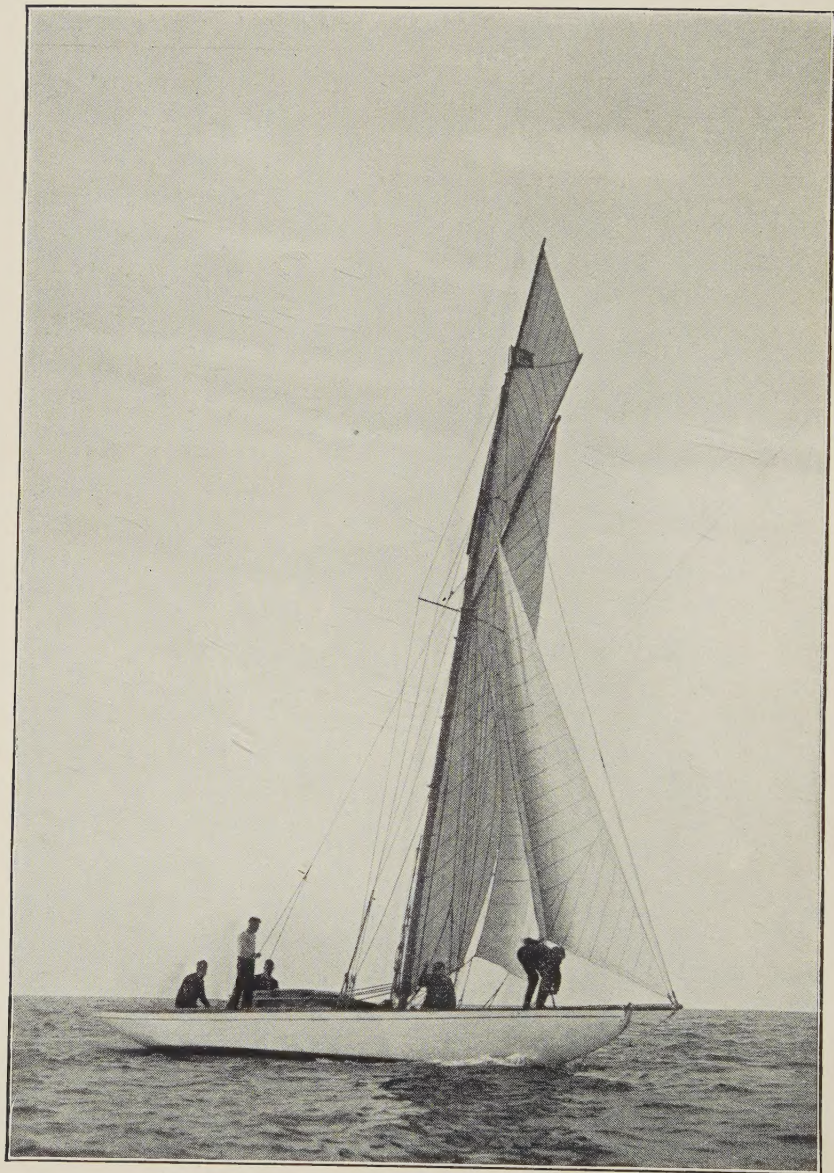
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AMATEURS AFLOAT



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"IOMHAR."

AMATEURS AFLOAT

by

H. IAN MACIVER

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AMATEURS AFLOAT

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION—MOTOR-BOATING—THE MOTOR-BOAT GETS MISLAID

My earliest recollections connected with the sea are of incidents which occurred during various extended cruises in my father's steam yacht *Colomba*, a three-hundred-tonner. As I got older, I sometimes went afloat in vessels belonging to people other than the members of my immediate family. Wherever I chanced to be and boats were also, it soon became known that I had a mania for getting afloat, and boat owners were very good in affording me opportunities to indulge my hobby. Arrived at the age of twenty-one, I decided to go up for a Yachtmaster's ticket, which in due course I acquired. Though I am glad to have passed for Yachtmaster, as by doing so I went much more thoroughly into the subject of navigation than I probably would have done in any other way, I am bound to admit that unless a young man is desperately keen on the work he would be well advised not to attempt it.

The following year I went up and passed in steam—not because I specially desired to do so, but because I wanted to know exactly what that endorsement signified when found on a Master's certificate. Stated briefly, "passed in steam" means that the holder has a certain knowledge of engines and boilers, so that in the event of finding himself for any reason without engineers, he would probably be

able to carry on their work until the nearest port was reached.

About this time, early in 1907, certain friends and I decided to build a motor-boat, in which to cruise on the Mersey and the near-by coasts, the intention being to use her for a while and then to sell her at a profit. While she was still in process of building, it became apparent that she was going to cost much more than had at first been anticipated; my friends lost interest in her, and she became my sole charge.

Daimla measured ten tons, and had a speed of nine knots in smooth water; about a knot and a half below this might be regarded as a fair average to expect while cruising. The engine was a four-cylindered 1906 type Daimler car engine with poppet valves, burning petrol, placed aft, and the helmsman's position well forward. In the early days, communication between wheel and engine-room was by means of an electric bell. Two bells meant "Go ahead," one bell "Stop," and three bells "Go astern." This vessel was my first command after taking my certificate.

On the opening trip I went aboard to take her from Canning Dock into the river, full of confidence in my ability to cope with any situation which might arise—this by virtue of my brand-new ticket!

We struggled to the dock gates in a painful hit-and-miss sort of fashion, and having reached about the middle of the river on the last of the flood tide, the engine stopped entirely, refusing absolutely to restart. All my early confidence had by now melted away, and I was beginning to feel scared. We had auxiliary sails on board, and we proceeded to bend and set them, at the same time getting some chain on deck and the anchor ready for letting go. As we set the sails, so the wind dropped. Then we drifted, rather than sailed, into a safe berth on the west side of the

river, near Rock Ferry, and with much relief cast anchor and stowed the sails away, thus ending the first voyage, a voyage which entirely altered my outlook on life, as I appreciated for the first time that the possession of a certificate does not provide a man with a ready road out of all difficulties, but, though he possess one, he must still rely on his own common sense and seamanship in an emergency.

To detail all our early troubles with this boat would fill a book, and as space does not permit such verbosity, I will content myself with saying that, after many trials and failures, by which we acquired much useful knowledge, we at length had things in such a condition that there was a fair chance that the vessel would go ahead, or stop, when required ; sometimes, she would even go astern on demand.

One little trick she had during the first few months of her life which was apt to be disconcerting to a novice. When going ahead, apparently in the best of tempers, without the slightest warning the engine would stop dead, and refuse to start again for perhaps half an hour. Becoming used to this peculiarity of hers, I formed the habit of never crossing the bows of even a vessel at anchor, if I could by any means avoid doing so. This custom, no doubt, was the means of often saving us from serious damage by collision.

The communication by electric bell from steering-wheel to engine-room did not always prove entirely satisfactory. One case in particular comes to mind, where a collision occurred entirely due to the inadequacy of this bell. It was one regatta day in the year 1908, at Rock Ferry, when we had on board a party of newspaper reporters and others, who had joined us for the purpose of following the races. The flagship was a sailing yacht, with a long bowsprit, and she was anchored at one end of the starting line. Certain

members of our party wished to put something aboard the flagship, and to enable them to do this I went close up to the bow of that vessel, so that we might be well clear of the starting line.

A strong flood tide was running at the time. I rang one bell; the propeller duly stopped, we slid into position and made our transfer. Next, two bells were rung, this being the order to go ahead. To my horror, instead of going ahead the engineer went astern. We fell across the bows of the flagship, her bowsprit transfixing our engine-room! There we hung, looking particularly foolish, until we were assisted clear. As the bowsprit entered the engine-room, the engineer put his head out, and addressing me, said:

“Did you ring three bells, sir?”

“No. I rang two, for you to go ahead.”

“Sorry. I expected you to go astern, and thought I heard three bells,” was his not very helpful comment; but it showed me quite clearly that some form of visible indicator was essential. Therefore, the electric bell was scrapped, and a dial indicator installed in its place, which never gave rise to any mistake.

As *Daimla* was primarily built for river and estuary work, she was of very shallow draft, and was fitted with a long trunk cabin with glass windows the whole length of each side, which gave her an appearance not unlike that of a tramway car. Opinions were freely expressed, when she made her first trip, that though she might be quite satisfactory in smooth water, she would be positively dangerous if she met any weather. For one thing, all were agreed that in the first breeze of wind she met her windows would immediately get smashed.

As is often the case, public opinion erred. For a boat of her type, she was a wonderfully weatherly craft. Lively she was, without a doubt, but it was that very liveliness

which saved her life. Instead of punching through a wave, she would jump over it, and when in a beam sea she would roll away from the waves, presenting a high side to their attack, in such a way that they did not break on board. Never, during the years that I had her, did she ever lose a pane of glass due to bad weather, though she was at sea in many a hard blow. She was not the type of vessel which would appeal to everyone, as the following little anecdote will show.

In August 1913 I was away in another boat, attending a regatta at Holyhead, and by request lent the motor-boat to a party of fellow-yachtsmen who wished to see the regatta. They were to find their own crew, and to take full responsibility for the vessel until they put her back on her moorings in the Mersey on completion of the Holyhead voyage.

On the outward passage everything apparently went well, as the party duly arrived at Holyhead in time for the regatta. As I was leaving Holyhead for the Mersey one evening after the races were finished, I was hailed by my friends, who asked why I was clearing out then, instead of waiting until the morning. My reply was to the effect that I did not like the weather outlook, but intended to go while the going was good, and make the best of a fair tide. This decided my friends to make a start also, and they overtook us before we passed the West Mouse. We took the inshore passage, close in to the North Anglesey coast, to make the best of the smooth water to be found there while daylight lasted. *Daimla* also kept inshore.

As dusk came down, the weather looked rather threatening, and as a precautionary measure we stood off shore, in order to get a good offing in case it should come on to blow during the night. When we altered course we soon lost sight of the motor-boat, which when we last saw her was still sticking to the inshore passage.

That night there was a bit of a breeze, but the weather was not bad on the whole, and towards morning the wind dropped away and a dense fog came down. In spite of this, we safely reached our moorings in the Mersey the same afternoon. When we arrived we looked to see whether *Daimla* had got in ahead of us—she should have finished her trip eight hours before, if she came right through. To our surprise she was nowhere to be seen, and inquiries ashore proved fruitless: nothing had been seen of her since she left the Mersey four days previously. Of this we did not think much at the time, assuming that she had put in somewhere for a sleep, and that if she came on at daylight she might be showing up at any moment. Night came, and there was still no sign of the wanderer.

For several days nothing was heard of her, and it was only a chance meeting with one of her crew who had made the trip in her to Holyhead that eventually threw light on her disappearance. After we lost sight of them, so the story ran, it became dark, and the sea began to get up. The boat bounced and knocked about until her crew were unable to remain on their feet. The lights were extinguished by the seas, and it seemed impossible to go on. A council of war was held by her crew, and it was unanimously decided to turn and run for the nearest shelter.

There happened to be a handy inlet not far away, Kemmaes Bay, and into this they crept in the dark. Coming to an anchor, they all turned in for the night. When daylight came they made the best of their way to the nearest railway station, and took the first train home. It was their stated intention to return for *Daimla* the following week-end, when they proposed to complete the trip to the Mersey. Meanwhile, no member of the party felt that it was incumbent on him to let me know what had happened.

It was a strange thing that, inshore as they were, and the

weather shore to boot, they should encounter such a sea as they described, while we, peacefully standing off the land, should meet no weather worth mentioning. However, there it is—that was the yarn which was spun for our benefit.

Naturally, they were told not to bother to collect her ; some of our own crowd would go and bring her back at the first opportunity.

CHAPTER II

A LIVELY PASSAGE

WHEN in due course we started on the passage back from Kemmaes with *Daimla*, it chanced that a small sailing-boat, then lying in the Menai Straits, was wanted in the Mersey, and as we were in the neighbourhood, we offered to take her in tow and bring her to Liverpool. It happened that one of our crew, known as "Pinchbar," owing to his propensity for describing a marline-spike by that name in moments of excitement, was joining us at the Straits on the Saturday afternoon, and, the tide serving about midnight, we decided to make a start at that hour. We made our dinghy fast astern of the sailing-boat, and using our best three-inch rope as tow line, off we started. Going through the Sound it was pitch dark, but even in the dark a quite considerable sea was to be observed running in from the north-west; still, the thought of that did not trouble us much, as we should have it on the quarter while pursuing our course to the Mersey.

Once clear of the Sound and steadied on our course, I retired below to try to get some sleep, handing over the wheel to the Mate—one commonly called "Test," which may have been an abbreviation of "Testy," a condition very usual with the gentleman in question when newly aroused from slumber. A solicitor by profession, he was nevertheless an able hand, and until lost to us through marriage was regularly one of the crew.

Not more than ten minutes had elapsed when I felt a jerk

and heard a twanging sound. Sending on deck to find out what had happened, I was informed that the tow-rope had parted, and that the tow was out of sight astern. With visions of the jolly picnic in store for me before my eyes, I turned out and went on deck, well knowing that there could be no further hope of sleep for me that night.

Even in the short time I had been below the sea had increased, and white-capped waves were now all around us. Our little vessel was bucking and kicking like a spring lamb, which added not a little to the difficulty of getting about the decks.

Taking over the wheel, I turned the boat round and proceeded slowly back along our tracks. After some five minutes at that speed I caught a gleam of white among the seas ahead, and this proved to be our late tow, now lying beam on to the sea with our dinghy alongside her, and rolling very heavily.

On my calling for a volunteer to board the tow from among the crew, one said he would go if another would accompany him. This was "Cam," abbreviation for "Camel," lanky of leg and long of neck, stated to suffer at times from "the hump," though he said it was due to liver. He was so labelled soon after joining, and the name stuck, as such things will. A second volunteer was at once forthcoming in "Test," and now came the operation of putting them aboard. Owing to the rolling of our boat, and also the tow, I dared not attempt to go alongside, for fear that the respective masts should foul each other. Instead I decided to put my bow near the quarter of the tow, so that the volunteers could jump on board. I dared not stay in position for more than a moment, as the boats would almost certainly have smashed into one another had I attempted to do so.

The method adopted was to approach the tow with good

way on *Daimla*, taking the tow on the starboard bow. When I judged that she had sufficient way to take her into position, I rang full speed astern, so that the astern-running left-handed propeller should keep the bow clear of the quarter of the tow. The operation was entirely successful; there was no actual contact between the boats, but only one volunteer, "Test," had time to make the transfer, and he had not got the tow-rope. A second attempt had therefore to be made, and this time, in my anxiety to get "Camel" on board with the rope, I slightly overdid the headway, and a sea striking the tow at the same moment, set her down towards us. We just touched, but so slight was the contact that we did not even damage the paint. The tow-rope was soon made fast, and away we went, bound for the Mersey once more.

For perhaps a quarter of an hour all went well. Then, just as we were congratulating ourselves that our troubles were over, another twang was heard, and looking round, we saw the tow disappearing into the darkness astern, once more all adrift, owing to the parting of the rope.

Not having any stronger rope on board, it was apparent that to attempt further towing in the sea then running would be a waste of time and trouble, not to mention the risks involved each time the tow-rope had to be re-secured. Turning our boat round, we went back, and stopped just to windward of the little sailing-boat, which was tumbling about in all directions, and doubtless making it most uncomfortable for her crew. Hailing these two hardy mariners, I shouted:

"You two birds can get sail on that hooker, and take her through to Liverpool under canvas. I'm sick of trying to tow, but will stand by to pick you up in case you get swamped."

They waved to show that they understood, and we hove-

to, to wait until they should have her under sail and be ready to proceed.

Lying-to was very uncomfortable, and after a while we went ahead slowly with our shoulder to the sea, our vessel riding more easily that way than any other; also, when lying all stopped she made a good deal of leeway, and the Great Orme was too close dead a-lee for comfort. One way and another, we got sufficiently far from our friends to lose sight of them altogether; that little white boat was very difficult to pick out in the general smother due to tide and wind.

Her disappearance did not worry us unduly. We felt that she could not be far away, and that we were bound to see her as soon as she hoisted her mainsail. In this supposition we were wrong. For the next hour we never got a glimpse of her. What could have happened to her? After all this time, she must be under sail, if she were not to drift ashore.

Encouraged by the glint of dawn, we took renewed hope. Daylight would soon be with us. It was now nearly half-past two, and day must soon break.

As day broke, we carefully searched the waste of tumbling waters surrounding us, but never a trace of our friends could we see. Then for the first time we began to feel anxious, but we were not kept long in suspense. Casting my eye round the horizon at random, between two wave crests some three miles dead to windward I caught the glint of a tiny red sail. Our friends were still afloat.

Away we went in pursuit, and came up with them in about half an hour, or perhaps a little less. They presented an interesting sight. To our great surprise, we noticed that they were carrying a whole mainsail, in addition to a jib. Under this press of sail the little boat was tearing through it on a broad reach, and her lee quarter was

continuously submerged in a following wave. The crew were both sitting most of the time on the weather side of the cockpit, with their backs keeping out the water, which, breaking against the side of the boat, would otherwise have found its way below. At intervals one of them would leave his post, and could then be seen throwing out water with a bucket.

Every now and then, when a specially large sea broke, from our position to windward we lost sight of the crew, except for their heads, in a swirl of foam, and this foam would frequently only find its way to leeward by passing clear over the head of the mainsail.

We kept station to the best of our ability on their weather quarter, with the idea of affording them what protection we could from the effect of the wind and sea. It was evident that they were having the Dickens of a time, but we were powerless to assist, and perforce had to content ourselves with hoping that the weather would get no worse. As things then were it seemed, bar accidents, that they had a very good chance of winning through, and that we might not have to pick them up, after all. They were making nearly seven knots through the water, in spite of pulling along with them our heavy dinghy, which they still had in tow. Except that the gaff jaws had broken, everything went well until we were off the mouth of the Dee, when the sea became, if anything, worse than it had been before.

As they were now well to windward of the entrance to the Mersey, they watched for a smooth, and, finding one, luffed sharply into the wind and dropped their mainsail. Running before the wind under headsail only, they then proceeded to close reef their main and to bale out the boat, ready for the passage up river. Seeing them now in a fair way towards being snugged down, and coming to the conclusion that, having run so far safely, they would be unlikely

to get into any mischief for the rest of the passage, I decided to leave them, a decision in which my own crew heartily concurred, as they had for hours been sick of tramping along at reduced speed.

My crew at this time consisted of "Pinchbar," and one other called "The Dog," who acted as engineer. The derivation of his appellation, though perhaps somewhat involved, follows a clear sequence. One of his names was Colin; this became Collie as a pet name; later Collie became Collie dog; and then Collie was dropped, leaving only "The Dog."

Accordingly I altered course, and taking a short cut between the banks which our very shallow draft made possible, by going full speed we were soon in smooth water, and shortly afterwards reached our moorings, where we made fast, to await the arrival of our adventurous friends with our dinghy.

When I mentioned that my own crew were sick of our behaviour outside, I might have said "sick" in both senses of the word. They were not only sick, but very unhappy, and in one case I can but suspect not a little frightened. As we turned to go in between the banks, our engineer suddenly got up and made a rush for the side of the launch, looking the very picture of misery. In full flight, as it were, he was seized round the waist and prevented from reaching the ship's side by "Pinchbar," who had evidently not grasped the idea which was occupying the mind of "The Dog" at that moment.

"Let go, you ass, or I shall be sick all over you," gulped "The Dog."

"Oh! Is that it?" exclaimed the other in a surprised tone of voice—"only going to be sick. I thought you intended to commit suicide, and determined to save you at all costs, whether you liked it nor not."

This little anecdote is, I think, a pretty clear indication that one member at least of our crew cannot have been too happy on that passage.

After we had been on moorings for nearly two hours our late tow turned up, but minus our dinghy. It appeared that soon after we left them the dinghy's painter carried away, and she went adrift. They naturally did not feel inclined to tempt Providence by attempting to recapture her, so decided to let her go. She eventually came safely ashore just outside the river, and within a week was with us once more.

"Test" and "The Camel" expressed great relief at seeing us safely on moorings when they arrived. This completely mystified us, until they explained that they had last seen us outside the river, when we were observed to apparently fall from the top of a big sea. Subsequently they got no further sight of us, and feared, in consequence, that our vessel had been overwhelmed and gone down with all hands.

Actually, only twice had we had any weight of water on deck during that night and morning, on each occasion entirely due to my carelessness in giving her the helm too suddenly while turning to run down wind. The effect of this was to send her counter so sharply to windward that it met the break of a sea, and resulted in her being pooped, with consequent partial flooding of the engine-room, the stopping of the engine by the inrush of water being solely prevented owing to the presence of "The Dog" in the engine-room doorway, whose back broke the weight of it, and so it passed harmlessly away into the bilge. Only once did the engine stop accidentally, and then for a very short period; this was due to some water getting on to the magneto. When this water was wiped away the engine took up work at once, and gave no further trouble.

CHAPTER III

DILEMMA—FIREWORKS—A SOLEMN OATH

GENERALLY *Daimla* behaved well, but not always. There were times when she made difficulties, but, on the whole, she was considerate in her selections of time and place to misbehave. At any rate, she never failed to get home somehow, which is more than can be said for most boats, particularly if they happen to be driven by an engine which was originally built for a car.

She nearly let us down one hot summer day in 1908, when we had been a trip to Conway from the Mersey, a distance of about forty-five miles. On the return journey we put in to Llandudno Bay, so that we might have tea in comfort before starting on the last thirty-five miles of the homeward run. Tea being finished and the gear stowed, we went to restart the engine, when, to our surprise, we found that we could not ship the starting-handle. Closer examination showed the reason for this was that the crankshaft had worn down the main bearings, particularly at the forward end, which made the shipping of the starting-handle an impossibility.

Here was a pretty pickle. Thirty-five miles from home, evening coming on, and a starting-handle which could not be shipped! Somehow or other, we must crank that engine round before she could start. Whether she would run or not, even if we succeeded in starting her, remained to be seen. We could but try.

Collecting spanners, bars, and other suitable instruments from among her spare gear, we fixed these on her flywheel,

on the forward end of her crankshaft, and in every other likely place. All hands pulled, pushed, and shoved on any of these, as opportunity served, when, to our delight, we got her over one compression. Shifting the grips of the spanners and other fixings, we repeated the process, and got her over another compression. It was a slow and back-breaking job, but it seemed our only chance, therefore we laboured away until she had passed over six compressions.

All the extraneous fittings were then removed and stowed away, and the coil ignition was switched on. At once the engine came to life and ran steadily, but with rather more noise than usual. Still, we were not inclined to be critical of small details, and were prepared to take some chances, so we got our anchor, let in our clutch with extreme caution, so as not to risk accidentally stopping the engine, and off we started for Liverpool.

The engine ran without a hitch until we reached our moorings at Rock Ferry.

Subsequently, on the engine being dismantled for examination, it was found that the forward bearing had seized and the anti-friction metal had run out. This end of the crankshaft, going down, had imposed too great a strain on the middle bearing, with the result that the crank-case, which formed the housing for that bearing, had fractured, thus dropping the bearing into line with the front one. The after bearing showed little damage, it being only slightly splayed or expanded at one end. That the engine should have brought us safely from Llandudno to the Mersey while in that condition was rather marvellous, and goes to show that there must be a Providence looking after the welfare of amateur yachtsmen.

The cause of the damage was simplicity itself. The day was hot, and on the run from Conway to Llandudno, "The Dog," our engineer, lay down on deck, enjoying the

sun. He dropped off to sleep, and overslept the time appointed for filling the lubricators, with the result that the forward bearing ran dry, after which it soon fired and caused all the trouble.

In July 1909 I was going to the Clyde to race, and thinking it would be nice to have the motor-boat up there at the same time, I got together a party of friends, and away we started from the Mersey one evening just before high water. The party consisted of "Test," "The Dog," "Camel," and the engineer who made the mistake of hearing three bells when only two were rung. He was younger than the rest of the party, and being, in our opinion, about as handy on his feet as a baby elephant, "Jumbo" was his name when on board. The idea of starting in the evening was in order that the hours of darkness might be passed on the open sea passage to the Isle of Man, daylight being more important later on.

As we went down the river in the gathering darkness a surprise awaited us. After passing the North Wall Lighthouse at the entrance to the Mersey, powerful searchlights were turned on us from both the Seaforth and Perch Rock batteries, making navigation very difficult. The lights were kept on us all the way down the channel, until we were almost blinded by the glare. The reason for these lights, we afterwards found out, was that a mock invasion of the Port of Liverpool had been arranged for that particular night; the searchlights were engaged in scanning the face of the waters in order to locate the hostile attacking fleet.

With difficulty proceeding on our way seaward, at length we got out of the range of the lights, to exchange the blinding glare for an inky blackness. A little less than two hours out, and before passing the Bar Lightship, a nasty cross sea began to get up. The dinghy, which had been lashed bottom up on the cabin top, started to work adrift.

To turn to and re-secure that dinghy, with the vessel rolling as she then was, in the pitch darkness, was a poisonous and risky job, but it had to be done, so we set to and did it.

Shortly after the incident of the dinghy, we altered course, thus bringing the sea right ahead, and then our real troubles commenced. From a more or less easy roll, we changed in a moment to a short and sharp pitching motion, *Daimla* jumping over one sea and dropping with a crash into the next. It was with the greatest difficulty that we kept a light burning in the binnacle; the vibration or shock as our vessel fell on to the top of a sea would constantly knock the light out. Engine-room and cabin lights were suffering in the same way, though the cabin light, being mounted in gimbals, survived rather longer than the others. The cabin lamp was fitted with a glass chimney, and this chimney proved to be the source of its final extinction. Our devoted ship met an exceptionally high and steep sea. Up rose her bows, higher and higher, until it seemed that she was trying to reach the clouds. To such an angle did she attain that the cabin lamp reached the limit of the range of its gimbals, the glass chimney struck the bulkhead against which the lamp was mounted, and out went both chimney and light.

Only a short time had elapsed after this happening when a sheet of spray, driven from the top of an adjacent comber, fell on the sidelights and extinguished both at once. The masthead light had been bounced out some time before.

While all this entertainment was in progress, "Jumbo," the engineer, made his way forward, and with a very scared face reported that he feared the ship would shortly catch fire! According to him, sparks were flying all over the engine-room, the exhaust pipes were red hot, as also were the sparking plugs. He was most keen that I should come and see for myself.

Though I did not want to leave the helm, I made a

virtue of necessity, and handing the ship over to one of the others, I clawed my way aft to the engine-room.

Arrived there, I found conditions much as the wretched "Jumbo" had described them, but on considering the matter I came to the conclusion that in all probability the engine did not keep this kind of behaviour specially for night trips. Without doubt things were usually the same by day, but owing to the presence of daylight the fact would not be noticed to the same extent. This explanation did not satisfy "Jumbo," and he still expected an explosion of petrol vapour. In order to convince him that no such vapour was present, I carried into the engine-room a lighted lamp, it being perfectly obvious to me that if such vapour were there the vessel would have gone up long before then.

Having thus disposed of this alarm, I once more made my way forward, only to find the weather getting worse. From time to time we had reduced speed in an effort to modify the crashes with which we met the oncoming seas, until our engine was now turning so slowly that we were making little or no progress. To go on meant that we should not be much further on our way by the time daylight broke; the light from the Bar was still visible in the sky; our binnacle light had long since refused to burn. Therefore, I suggested that, as the sea was still rising, we should turn and make the best of our way back to the Mersey, before losing the Bar Light, for which we could steer.

All hands agreed that this would be the wisest course to pursue, though they to a man expressed their willingness to carry on should I wish it. To be perfectly candid, I did not wish anything of the kind, and was only too ready to take the first chance of turning our vessel round and of wending our way homeward. Cowardice cannot, I think, be justly alleged against me for my action on this occasion; only, perhaps, the exercising of a wise discretion. Had we

gone on, we should probably have won through eventually, but it would have proved to be a long, weary, and uphill fight, even if successful in the end.

The return journey, as regards the first portion, was uneventful. The sea had become a following one, and we made much better weather of it. Once in the channel, the water rapidly smoothed. By now the sandbanks were mostly uncovered, it being nearly low water, and these afforded us considerable protection. The approach to the entrance of the river was made in the breaking dawn, a grey kind of half light, neither dark nor fully daylight.

In a kind of part-wakened condition, inseparable from a night spent out of bed, we were crawling along near the Rock Lighthouse. Suddenly, and without the slightest warning, two six-inch guns roared from the Perch Rock Battery, almost directly overhead, seeming, for the moment, as though their concussion would lift us completely out of the water. Our windows rattled, and everything aboard our little boat shook and jarred together, fully awakening us from our previous lethargic state. Looking round, we were just in time to see the Seaforth Battery join in, also with two guns, but of a somewhat lighter calibre. These guns, being on the opposite bank of the river, and therefore at a greater distance, did not shake us up to any appreciable extent.

Ejaculating "It would seem that we have won!", we proceeded on our way to an anchor up river, without the remotest idea as to why those guns had been fired at that particular moment. The true explanation came to us the following evening, when we received a newspaper from the shore containing a detailed account of the mock attack on the Port of Liverpool overnight. In it we read: "A very clever attempt was made, during the small hours of the morning, by one of the attacking cruisers to penetrate the

defences of the Port. Disguising one of her steamboats to look as much like a small yacht as possible, this boat was sent off just before the break of day to try to enter the Port. Creeping riverwards under the protecting lee of an inward-bound coasting steamer, she had almost succeeded in her mission when the sharp look-out kept by the defending batteries proved her undoing. She was seen by one of the batteries, and was promptly put out of action with a few well-directed shots."

This, then, was the reason for our noisy reception, though how we could have been mistaken for a cruiser's steamboat, no matter how carefully she might have been dressed up, was beyond our comprehension. Still, soldiers are sometimes strange beings, when matters connected with the sea are at issue.

For several days after our return to the river the north-west wind continued to blow with unabated severity, putting another start for the Clyde quite out of the question until conditions should improve materially. Almost daily one member or another of the original company found that his leave had expired, or that he had pressing business elsewhere to which he must attend. At length, only two of the crew remained by the ship, "The Dog," spare engineer, and "Cam," the acting mate. These two swore a solemn oath that take the ship to the Clyde they would, even by themselves alone; and that, further, neither would henceforth shave until their destination was reached. Gravely they shook hands upon it, and the contract was sealed.

I feel that something would be missing were I not to include at least a brief reference to the voyage made by these two. I could not be with them personally, as regattas cannot wait for individual convenience, and therefore I had perforce to leave the ship and go north by train to join up for the races.

CHAPTER IV

THE OATH IS KEPT—A UNIQUE EXHIBITION

PERHAPS a week after I deserted them conditions improved, and a start was made early one morning, in fine weather with an almost smooth sea. This time the dinghy was left behind, as it was considered that so much top-weight was too great a handicap to the vessel in the event of bad weather being encountered. Of navigation "Camel" knew little or nothing, but he chanced to remember the course I had set when leaving the Bar Lightship on that previous eventful night. In his opinion, this one course was amply sufficient; so steering, he would be able to make the Isle of Man, and afterwards the runs would be within sight of land, provided the weather proved clear.

The water remained smooth for the first part of the passage to the island. Relatively soon after losing sight of the Bar Lightship, blue mountains were seen in the far distance, and a heated discussion took place between "Camel" and "The Dog" as to whether this land which they saw was part of the Cumberland coast or the Isle of Man itself. Opinions varied, but at length they decided to continue on the original course until they were able to decide the point by a closer inspection. While still some twenty miles from the island, a strong headwind sprang up, and though a nasty short sea soon rose, they persevered. After about ten hours from the time of leaving their moorings, they ran into Ramsey Harbour, and tied up there for the night, feeling well pleased with their achievement so far.

The inhabitants of the island showed much interest in the vessel, and some of them requested permission to come on board to have a look round. One of these, on leaving, tipped "The Dog" two shillings, much to his embarrassment, but as to refuse would have been to mortally offend, he accepted the proffered gratuity, well knowing that to attempt to explain that he was a friend of the owner, and not a paid mechanic such as he appeared to be, would be utterly futile; also that it might make the visitor uncomfortable.

The next day there was a strong breeze, and, wisely, they decided to remain snug in harbour, instead of continuing their passage northwards.

Their patience was rewarded, for the following morning the wind had dropped and the sea had gone down until hardly a ripple showed on the surface of the water.

So soon as the floodtide permitted them to get out of the harbour, away they went, making good time across towards the Mull of Galloway. When some four miles distant from that forbidding headland, and just having passed through the tide race which is usually to be found abreast of this spot, "Camel" heard a crash in the engine-room. For a moment the engine raced, and the boat came to a stop; then the engine slowed down, and also stopped. Putting his head up from below and addressing the mate, "The Dog" remarked laconically:

"The bally show has busted."

The engine was coupled to the propeller through a reversing gear, of which an integral part was a short chain contained inside a cast-iron drum. Inspection showed that this chain had broken, and in breaking had forced its way through the side of the drum, in which now appeared a large hole. The chain was an essential part of the drive, and without it the gears were free to revolve, which enabled the engine to turn without moving the propeller.

What was to be done? There they were, four miles off the land, and not very far astern of them was a nasty tide race, through which they had recently passed, and towards which they were once more being carried.

"Camel" thought of the sails, so they set to work and soon had these set; but, quick as they were, the wind was quicker, for as they were actually setting the sails the wind was dropping away, until by the time all sails had been hoisted it was a stark oily calm, with not a breath of wind moving.

They tried rowing with the boathook and with bottom boards, but finding that this had little or no effect, they soon desisted.

"The Dog" then had an idea. Bolts, nuts, and odd pieces of metal could be dropped through the hole in the drum, and these, getting in between the gearwheel teeth, might jam the gears and so provide a drive. Right away they tried it, only to find, as soon as they restarted the engine, that the bolts and other oddments of metal were thrown out all over the engine-room through that same hole by which they had been introduced. None remained to jam the gear, and, fortunately, neither of the crew had been hurt while the experiment was being tried.

Another notion then occurred to "The Dog." If pieces of metal refused to stay in the drum because of the centrifugal action which was set up immediately the engine started, why not try introducing rags? These might wrap themselves round some of the shafts within the gear and thus hold themselves in position, and, at the same time, should they get between the teeth of the gearwheels, they might be expected to jam the gear for a time. Anyway, the idea seemed worth trying.

While "Cam" slowly turned the engine round by hand, "Doggie" fed in, through the hole in the broken drum,

handkerchiefs, socks, cleaning rags, shirts, and any other material that would be likely to serve. Soon the propeller shaft began to revolve, keeping pace with the turning of the engine. A jam had been effected—would it stand the strain when the engine started?

Trial proved that it would. The moment the engine began to fire, the vessel gathered headway. So far, so good. But how long would this temporary drive continue to be effective? The crew could not even hazard a guess, but, anyway, they were rapidly leaving the proximity of that dreaded tide race, and this was so much to the good. Even should their drive fail them within a few minutes, they now felt that they could always re-establish it, so long as the stock of shirts and other suitable clothing should hold out.

A search of the chart was then instituted, to ascertain the nearest port where they might expect to find shelter while they tried to execute repairs. The chart showed them a little indent in the coastline almost abreast of where they then were, marked Port Logan.

"If it is called a port, we should find shelter there," remarked "Camel," and to this "The Dog" agreed. Anything would be better than nothing, and, in any case, they could go and see for themselves.

Their temporary drive held on, and in about half an hour they entered a small bay, almost square in shape, with high ground on either side, but with a beach facing them as they entered. Jutting out from the shore on the starboard hand was a stone jetty, or breakwater, which gave the only hope of shelter should the wind come in from seaward.

The inhabitants of the port informed them, when they got within hail, that they would find a good safe berth alongside the jetty on the landward side. Nothing loath,

in they went and tied up, at the same time taking a sounding which showed them clearly that they would dry out at low water. However, this fact did not trouble them a great deal, though it would involve a certain amount of tide watch each time their vessel was floating or taking the ground.

Soon after they were safely in berth, and, engaged in having tea, a local worthy came down to interview them. He wanted to know the name of the ship, the name of her owner, where she hailed from, whither she was bound, and put many other questions of a like nature. He was, it seemed, the local representative of the Government, a kind of combined coastguard and harbourmaster. The replies to all his questions he gravely entered in a large tome. The arrival of a strange vessel was an event indeed in the life of that port, as not for many months had such a thing happened before the advent of our friends.

Tea completed, and all the questions answered in a satisfactory manner, the crew went ashore on a tour of investigation. They found a few houses, with a small general store which was also the post office, and, to their huge delight, what purported to be a smithy; this latter they marked down for early attention next morning, when the smith himself would be in attendance. Continuing on their way, they received every courtesy from the inhabitants, and encountering one of these on the opposite side of the bay from where their vessel was lying, they entered into conversation with him. After passing the time of day, he inquired whether they would like to see the fishpond. On their replying in the affirmative, without having the slightest idea what sort of a fishpond they were being invited to visit, their acquaintance told them that he was just on his way to feed the fish, of which he had charge. Not till then did they notice that the contents of a basket which

he was carrying consisted of varieties of small shellfish such as clams, cockles, and periwinkles.

Following him up the hillside and passing through a fissure between two high rock faces, they came to a gate formed of vertical iron bars placed across the path and secured with a chain and padlock. Taking a key from his pocket, their guide unlocked the fastening, and, removing the chain, admitted them to a chamber between the rocks which above was open to the sky. Below them, forming almost the whole floor of the place, was a deep, dark pool, surrounded at its outer edge by a kind of stone platform, or footway, connected to the path by a flight of stone stairs of semi-circular form built into the rock walls.

Gazing down into the pool from where they stood, they saw nothing but water surrounded by rocks, to which were clinging seaweeds and other marine growths in profusion, but never a sign of fish.

On the invitation of their new friend, they descended to the stone platform at the edge of the pool. When they reached it their guide emitted a shrill whistle, and then a strange sight met their eyes. In that hitherto apparently untenanted pool, signs of life appeared. From fissures, from behind rocks, and from beneath weed deep down in the pool, emerged fish: big fish, small fish, medium fish; old fish, young fish; fish of many sizes and types, but large fish predominating. Some of the large fish were fully three feet in length, mostly of the cod family, but various kinds of rock fish were also there in full force.

They emerged, not as you might expect, slowly and with caution, but, on the contrary, they shot out with a rush, making all speed for the surface of the water. Some of them, not satisfied even when they reached the top of the water, continued their rushing tactics until they propelled themselves head and shoulders on to the stone platform at

the very feet of their keeper, who, stooping down, gently tickled them with his finger—a proceeding which they seemed to enjoy—after which he rewarded each one with a succulent morsel specially selected from his basket. Then he turned his attention to the less bold members of his flock, which were swimming about near the surface of the pool with only the tips of their noses showing above the water. To each one of these, so far as he was able, he individually threw something. Like a shepherd tending his sheep, he seemed to know each of his charges by sight, and could give their detailed history, such as their breed and age, how long they had been in the pool, and many other interesting particulars concerning them.

He told his visitors that though the water of the pool was renewed from the sea the fish could not escape, as a grating was fitted across the aperture through which the water flowed. Some of the fish had been in the pool for many years, while others were comparatively newcomers. Practically the only disease which troubled the fish in their rocky home was a form of blindness which sometimes attacked them, particularly the older fish; on the whole, their health was excellent.

It was a most interesting exhibition, and it is probably quite unique. At any rate, I have never heard of the existence of any similar pool. The extraordinary tameness of such a collection of common seafish had to be seen to be really believed.

So interested was I in what I was told about the fishpond, that some four years after “Camel” and “The Dog” first discovered it, finding myself off Port Logan in a very light breeze and with the tide turning against me, I entered the bay and, letting go the anchor, went ashore to inspect the place for myself. The mind picture which I then brought away has materially assisted me in describing the place.

After seeing the fishpond, "The Dog" suggested a climb up one of the mountains on a voyage of discovery. "The Camel," not feeling sufficiently energetic to go climbing, declined the suggestion with thanks, and taking out his pipe, settled down on a rock to enjoy a quiet smoke and to rest his weary bones, while "The Dog" went climbing alone.

The evening being warm, "Camel" was soon lost in contemplation of things in general; or, in other words, he slumbered. It seemed that he had hardly more than sat down, when he was aroused by hearing wild yells coming from somewhere above him. Looking upwards towards the place from whence came the alarming sounds, tearing down the mountain side, proceeding with huge strides and great leaps, he saw "The Dog" rapidly approaching. In one hand he grasped a piece of rock, and in the other he was brandishing a large jack-knife with bared blade, and as he came he shouted.

"Camel," now thoroughly awake, jumped to the conclusion that "The Dog," poor chap, had been affected by the sun while climbing, and that he had suddenly become demented. The unfortunate "Cam" wondered what he should do. To be a stranger in a strange land, with a demented shipmate to look after, could not be said to be an enviable prospect.

"The Dog's" look was wild—he remembered that he had not shaved for nearly a fortnight. Owing to the heat of the day, he was clad only in cap, shirt, trousers, and shoes. The shirt flying open at the neck added its share to his generally dishevelled appearance.

Getting within speaking distance, he exclaimed:

"The blighter's escaped!"—a remark quite in keeping with the opinion which the mate had reluctantly been compelled to form as to his sanity. No other person than

the engineer had been visible on the hillside, so, naturally, "Cam" inferred that the blighter who had escaped was simply a hallucination. Thinking to soothe, he gently inquired:

"Who has escaped? And where did he go?"

"That blighted rabbit. I nearly had him, but he escaped among the rocks," replied "The Dog," in a deeply aggrieved tone of voice.

So that was the explanation, and "Cam" had alarmed himself to no purpose, "The Dog" having been perfectly innocently engaged in the pursuit of a rabbit which he happened to disturb when high up on the hill.

Returning to their ship, they began to dismantle the clutch gear, so that it might be ready for repairs next day.

Next morning they interviewed the blacksmith, who expressed himself willing to do what he could to assist them, but they were not much impressed with the contents of the smithy, as apart from an anvil and forge and sundry hammers and sets, there appeared to be but few tools. However, beggars cannot be choosers, so they rigged suitable gear and hoisted out the clutch on to the jetty. Then, borrowing a wheelbarrow, they carted the clutch to the smithy. The smith looked at the clutch, then looked at them. Scratching his head, he gave it as his opinion that he could make a steel band to go round the drum and cover the hole, but he doubted if he could do anything with the chain; however, he would try, and maybe they would come back that evening. It was evident that he did not wish to be watched at work, so they went away to possess their souls in patience until the evening, when they would be at liberty to return and see how the repairs had progressed.

The evening came at last, and back they went to the smithy to find the smith just knocking off work for the

day. He had made a band to go round the drum, and this, no doubt, would be satisfactory, but over the chain he confessed himself beaten. He had forged two spare sides for the broken link, but to drill and finish them was beyond his capacity; nor did he feel that he could reassemble the chain.

Very diffidently, the crew inquired whether they might try their hands at the job.

"Och aye! Surely," said the smith. "The morn's morn."

This meant that he intended to lock up for the night, but that they might come along in the morning and have a go at the job themselves.

On the following day, after breakfast, back they went to the smithy, and after many difficulties managed to make up some kind of a spare link, which, though by no means mathematically correct, they thought might serve the purpose. Assembling the chain with the new link, they put the clutch together and wheeled it to the jetty. Hoisting it on board, they began the work of installing it, and continued until dusk.

Next day they finished coupling up, and the vessel being then afloat, they started the engine and tried out the clutch. Though far from smooth in its action, it seemed to take the drive, so they thereupon decided to start for the Clyde as soon as the tide served on the morrow. A telegram was written out addressed to me, saying that they had left Port Logan at —— (the time was left blank), repairs completed, all well. This telegram they took ashore and handed to one of the natives of the place, with the request that when he should see them leave, would he please fill in on the form the time of their departure, and despatch it?

CHAPTER V

WELCOMING THE WANDERERS—GENERAL REPAIRS UNDER DIFFICULTIES

ABOARD *Javotte*, on the Clyde, I duly received the telegram soon after noon next day. As it chanced, we did not happen to be racing, and it was suggested that we should sail out to meet the wanderers down the estuary.

There was a fine sailing breeze blowing, so the idea was received with acclamation, forming, as it did, a good excuse for getting under weigh. A fine beam wind sent us tramping along at a good seven knots.

After less than two hours under sail we sighted a little white speck away down abreast of the Cumbrae Lighthouse. Speculation became rife as to whether this could be the object of our search. I said it undoubtedly was what we were looking for, but the notion was scouted on all sides.

"A little thing like that could never come through all the way from Liver`pool," seemed to be the general opinion.

We closed her very rapidly, and were soon able to distinguish "Camel" at the wheel. "The Dog" also showed up, but we were not so sure of him, on account of his growth of carroty whiskers. We were accustomed to see him clean shaven, and now he had whiskers, and certainly looked far from clean.

Hailing them to stop, we hove round, and I went aboard in *Javotte's* dinghy, the owner of *Javotte* inquiring as I left his ship whether I would like him to give us a tow. Refusing the offer, I said that we would do our best to

keep up with him. Thereupon, he offered to shorten sail, so that he would not leave us too rapidly. I begged him not to trouble to wait, as we would get along somehow.

Arrived aboard my own ship, I at once informed the crew of the gibes which had just been passed, and their ire was roused. Get to Strone ahead of *Javotte* we must, at all costs. Off we went, and were some hundred yards or so ahead before *Javotte* had retrieved her dinghy. On she came after us at a fine pace, but, to our huge delight, instead of catching us, she steadily dropped astern. In the end, we arrived at our destination off Strone pier fully twenty minutes ahead of her.

To go back to the point at which I transferred from *Javotte*. On stepping from the dinghy I was received by the mate, who reported a good passage from Port Logan. The engine, however, did not sound too well, and "Cam" suggested that I should go below and see for myself. A strange picture presented itself as I looked into the engine-room. All over the floor, sides, and deck was a thick plaster of yellow grease, which had evidently escaped from the drum when it failed off the Mull of Galloway. The noise going on was terrific, and the engine was jumping up and down on its seating like a galloping horse. Closer examination showed that this eccentric action was due to the failure of three bolts out of the total of four by which the engine should have been held down; only the one at the port after corner of the engine was holding on. Much of the noise seemed to come from a defective connecting-rod bearing.

Inquiries from "The Dog" brought the information that while they were passing Ailsa Craig everything was running so nicely that he, soothed by the steady beat of the machinery and by the swish of the water overside, dropped off to sleep. While he slept the lubricators ran

dry and the noise now to be heard so loudly suddenly developed. This woke him up, but the engine was still running, so he refilled his lubricators and carried on, hoping for the best. What the damage might be he did not know, but suspected that one of the bottom end bearings had overheated and melted out its metalling.

The first job, after the crew had slept the sleep of wearied travellers and had breakfasted in peace, was to get under way and go up to Sandbank, where repairs might be possible. Arrived there, we dismantled the engine, and soon saw that one of the bottom end bearings had indeed melted its white metal.

Taking that bearing with us, we made our way ashore to ascertain whether anybody there could re-metal and machine it for us. Ashore we found a quaint sort of machine shop, part foundry and part many other things. A lathe there was, of such size that it would have been quite useful for turning up the propeller shaft of a thousand-ton vessel. Designed to be driven by a steam engine, it was fitted with a winch handle to the spindle of its headstock, so that it could be revolved by manual power at times when steam might not be available. The power of the steam engine and boiler was such that, before it would be worth lighting up, the job in hand must be of considerable dimensions.

Interviewing the proprietor, we were informed that, business being slack, he had no men at present capable of doing what we wanted, as his only employee was away on a job, and he would not return before the end of the week. We could not afford to wait, for we wanted the job done right away; this we explained, and requested permission to use his gear and to have a shot at doing the job ourselves. He gave us the required permission without hesitation. Having got that, we began a tour of exploration, and at

length found some white metal, though not by any means of the best quality. A suitable pot in which to melt it was unearthed from behind a heap of mixed scrap; soldering gear of a strange type was laboriously collected from the most unlikely places; of moulding sand there was plenty lying about in heaps on the floor. All the impedimenta having been at length got together, we started one of the forge fires, and before long had managed to reline our bearing fairly successfully.

After filling, the bearing required boring to size, and this was where we came up against a real snag. The immense lathe had no suitable chucks for holding our bearing, and we realised that to attempt to make clamps with which to secure it on the only face-plate, so that it could be bored, would take a long time, and even then success would be doubtful, owing to the difficulty of getting it properly centred. Looking round for a boring tool, we saw nothing which would be suitable for the purpose, unless we were to forge one from one of the heavy tools of other types which were strewn about. Even were we to succeed in making a suitable forging, we had no grinder on which we could finish it. The only thing in the place on which any grinding could be done was a very antiquated grindstone which ran horribly out of truth, and which had to be turned by hand.

Fortunately, in filling our bearing we had cored it to within about three-sixteenths of an inch of its finished diameter. Under the circumstances, we decided to dress it to size by hand with files and scrapers. We got it approximately to size, and then took it aboard for final fitting. There we scraped it with pocket knives until it was a fair fit.

By the time this part of the work was completed the afternoon was far spent, and as we wished to get back to

our anchorage off Strone before tea-time, we decided that we would take the boat there under sail. A strong breeze was blowing, so before getting under way we chocked off as best we could the various pieces of the engine, which were lying in heaps all over the place, in order that they should not go adrift on the passage and possibly knock a hole in our planking. The sail plan was but a jury rig; however, once we managed to get clear of the berth where we were lying, the wind would be fair for the run to Strone.

Everything being as snug as we could make it, we hoisted our sails and weighed anchor. On the whole, luck was with us. After several hairbreadth escapes from calamity—our vessel only missing other yachts at anchor by inches—we wore ship; nearly losing overboard in the process “The Dog,” who had the mainsheet in his hand when the sail gybed; we reached Strone safely without further incident.

After tea the engine was put together, and on being tried, much of the noise was found to have disappeared. In fact, it ran better than might reasonably have been anticipated, and gave no further trouble while we remained on the Clyde.

“Camel” and “The Dog” lived on board *Daimla* during the whole period, while I stayed either aboard *Javotte* or with her owner in his house on shore.

The motor-boat had a very heavy main anchor. It exceeded one hundred pounds, and should have had weight enough to hold her in any weather. When heaving up the anchor the crew stood on the foredeck, and hove in the cable hand over hand from where it passed inboard through a roller fairlead attached to the stemhead. This in itself was hard work, but the last operation of all was much worse. When the anchor at last reached the surface of the water, it had to be gripped firmly by one of the crew—

there was not sufficient room for more than one to get at it at one time—and that member of the crew had to lift it on board by brute force.

As getting the anchor was such hard work, and heaving in the cable so arduous a proceeding, the crew got in the way of never veering more cable than they deemed to be absolutely essential to hold the ship.

Thus one morning it came about that, after a particularly peaceful night, "The Dog," being the first to awake, went on deck, where he found, to his surprise, that their vessel was lying actually under Strone pier. Evidently they had dragged their anchor during the night and, both being sound sleepers, they had not been disturbed when she rove herself under the pier. Fortunately, there was not a breath of wind, so no damage was done, and, starting up the engine, they were soon back in their old anchorage, nobody but themselves being any the wiser. This incident shows how an attempt to save oneself trouble in the matter of veering cable might easily land a boat in a serious predicament. Had there been any wind, much damage might have resulted; also, had the little vessel failed to dock herself so neatly under the pier, her next stop would probably have been fully six miles further up the estuary. I advise anybody who may have charge of a boat always to veer more cable than the minimum that may appear necessary when anchoring, particularly when on strange ground.

On another occasion it happened that "The Dog" wished to go ashore to pay a call. So, taking the dinghy, off he went, leaving the mate on board by himself, and telling him that he might as well hang around, as he, "The Dog," would not be away long. This idea did not appeal to "Cam," as he had no confidence that his engineer would soon return. He did not wish to let go his anchor, not relishing the prospect of having to heave it up again later

on. No, he knew a trick worth two of that. Not far away was floating a small buoy; to whom it belonged he did not know, nor did he particularly care. He would not want to lie there very long, and, anyway, he could always clear out if the owner turned up and claimed the mooring.

Steering for the buoy, he picked it up, and heaving in the slack of the buoy rope made it fast. Going aft, he stopped his engine and went below for a smoke while awaiting the return of "The Dog." After a while he woke up, and, taking a look round, was surprised to see that he was now far out towards the centre of the estuary.

When making fast to the mooring he had forgotten the rising tide, with the result that, as the flood made, his vessel had lifted the sinker off the ground. The wind at the time was blowing off the land, so he soon drifted seaward.

The sinker of the mooring being much too heavy for him to lift single-handed, and as he was too far out to expect any assistance from "The Dog," he slipped the whole thing and, starting his engine, made his way back to the shore, arriving just as "The Dog" had begun to wonder what could have happened to him.

At a later date we received a claim from the owner of the moorings for compensation on account of their loss. As his complaint seemed reasonable under the circumstances, it was duly satisfied by presenting him with another stone and wire to replace those which he had lost.

CHAPTER VI

FIRST SAILING YACHT—SATISFACTORY TRIAL TRIP—A BRIGHT LOOK-OUT—A GHOSTLY WAKE

BECOMING tired of motor-boating after a period of years, in 1911 "Test" and I made up our minds to acquire jointly a sailing craft, as by this means we might have some racing, while still retaining the motor-boat, on board of which to take our meals and spend the nights, also for use as tow-boat when required. As neither of us had ever owned a sailing yacht before, and because we intended to use her mainly in the Mersey, which is but a poor place for sailing, on account of the strong tide and general dirtiness of the water and atmosphere, we looked round for something cheap with which to start. We managed at last to purchase, for a relatively small sum, an extremely antiquated fully-decked vessel named *Eureka II*, of about eleven tons yacht measurement.

Full-bodied and bluff of bow, she did not look a speedy craft in any sense of the word; in fact, it was the general opinion that in nothing short of a gale of wind aft could she prove anything but a sluggard. She had the reputation of being rather a tender ship, and her outside lead ballast weighed less than two tons. To improve matters, her late owner had added rather more than a ton of iron, which he stowed inside beneath the flooring of the cabin. Being full-bodied, she was a vessel with but little rise of floor, and therefore this inside ballast filled up almost the whole of the available space. Her sails were good, but were

painted, and consequently stiff and difficult to handle. In most places she was fairly sound, though here and there were to be found soft patches in her planking. When upright, she was quite tight, but if heeled to any extent the water could be seen running in through those seams which, when she had no list, would be normally above the water-line. Her decks also leaked in places.

To compensate for these disadvantages she had, fitted alongside the cockpit, an exceptionally large and efficient pump.

Owing to her relatively shallow bilge, and to the quantity of inside ballast which she carried, it was only necessary to collect a very small amount of water down below before it would slop about over the cabin floor, and when the vessel heeled it ran into the side lockers and bunks.

The pump suction, being in line with the keel at the lowest point of the vessel's hull when upright, was of little use for extracting the water if the vessel should chance to have anything of a list when the pump was worked.

In consequence of these peculiarities she was a distinctly uncomfortable ship for her crew when passage making, as everything below was usually saturated with bilge water.

In general design, she followed closely the style of the Morecambe Bay fishing-boat, and possessed most of its characteristics. Unless trimmed very much by the stern and carrying a huge jib, she was always very hard-mouthed in any weight of wind. When on a wind her helm had to be kept a long way up to hold her on her course, unless the mainsheet was so much slacked away that most of the driving power of the mainsail was lost.

Soon after buying her, "Camel" and I got her under way one evening under jib and mainsail only, thinking that this was sufficient canvas to carry for a first attempt, as there were only the two of us on board. Turning to wind-



"EUREKA II."

ward down river, we got along quite well, and found that, though slow in stays, she was not difficult to handle provided she was allowed plenty of time.

Down river we met her late owner, out for an evening sail with his new twenty-ton yawl. Just for fun, we turned to run up astern of him, so that we might observe the difference in speed between the two boats. Soon finding that he was not getting away from us as rapidly as we had expected would be the case, we decided to try to set our spinnaker, on the chance of being able to overhaul him.

Though a tricky job, we got that spinnaker set between us, and, to our huge delight, we not only overhauled, but passed the yawl before we reached our moorings. Her owner, to whom when bargaining for *Eureka II* we had emphasised the fact that we were mere amateurs, subsequently observed, *apropos* of this incident, that the two handling *Eureka II* on this occasion were about the hairiest pair of amateurs it had ever been his fate to encounter.

After this first experimental tryout we entered *Eureka II* in various local handicap races, but found her to be a very slow starter, and though she secured a flag or two on handicap, we felt that she ought to do better.

In spite of having been told that she was rather a tender ship, our conclusion was that she was half dead, due to excess of weight. Therefore we landed the whole of her inside ballast, which left her with less than two tons in all, and this entirely external.

After this alteration she certainly was much more free-moving in every respect. She got away in infinitely less time, and showed a liveliness where before she had been dead. She leaked less, and though she heeled more easily and to a greater angle, was a much drier ship. She lost on only one point in consequence of the reduction of her total weight—she did not carry her way as she used to do

prior to landing the ballast, and greater care had to be taken to see that she did not stop altogether while in stays. During bad weather, in anything of a sea, she would sometimes fail to come round, and get in irons, making it necessary to complete the operation by means of a stern-board on a reversed helm.

Usually she came round without difficulty, if carefully handled, but sometimes a sea would strike her weather bow just before she was head to wind, and this would knock all the life out of her. Quick action and a reversed helm would generally ensure that her head would fall off on the proper tack, but the greatest care had to be exercised on these occasions. A hand had to be standing by ready to slack away the mainsheet, for unless this were done at the right moment, she would continue to pay off, out of control of her helm due to lack of headway, until the weight of wind in the mainsail pressed her down so as to put the cockpit under water. In this condition she would be practically on her beam ends and completely out of control. If her mainsheet was slacked away to just the right amount at the correct moment, she would gather headway, and come under control of her helm very quickly, before she had fallen off more than six points from the wind. She could then be put back on her course and the slack of the mainsheet gathered in.

I knew a case once where a somewhat similar type of boat went over on her beam ends, filled, and was totally lost, simply because she lost steerage way, and as she paid off her mainsheet was kept fast. To lose steerage way in any weight of wind when under sail, even in a vessel which is almost wholly decked, is, to my mind, the one condition of all others to be guarded against. It constitutes almost the only real danger, providing that the boat's gear is good and can be relied upon to stand up to its work.

Having lightened the ballast in *Eureka II*, her racing record became one of almost continuous successes; and instead of proving a boat that would require at least half a gale of wind to move her, she soon acquired the reputation of being a witch in light airs. Indeed, it appeared amazing how an apparently clumsy old tub such as she could ghost along with little or no wind. Once, in 1912, we beat her out of Holyhead Refuge Harbour, in the early morning, from among dozens of vessels at anchor, when the flame from a match, which was struck to ascertain the direction of the wind, flared almost vertically. Still, she tacked out from her anchorage, never losing steerage way, never touching anything, and, above all, never once missing stays. How she did it, I don't pretend even to hazard a guess.

Finding that she was such a good performer in quiet weather, it seemed worth while to improve her still further if possible, and with that object in view, we ordered for her a huge balloon head sail of union silk. Except that this sail was cut rather high in the foot, it filled the whole of the fore triangle, from the masthead to the bowsprit end. When the new sail was in use, the jib and staysail were removed entirely, and the sail itself was worked with a single sheet, which had to be passed from side to side round the forestay when required. Though a slow and troublesome method, it answered its purpose well enough, for the reason that this sail was mainly used when there was too little wind properly to fill the ordinary jib and staysail, which, being painted, required quite a breeze to make them stand. When first the new sail was thought of, the intention was to use it only when reaching, but, ascertaining by experience that it would stand when working to windward, we latterly employed it on practically all points of sailing.

After she had taken part in many local races and we had

reached the stage when we felt that we had a full knowledge of her worst habits, she was entered for the 1912 Midnight Race from the Mersey to Port St. Mary, in the Isle of Man. Her entry for this race was regarded more in the light of a joke than anything else, as she was not believed to be anything but a slow old wagon which was sometimes lucky over short races in smooth water. So much was this the case that, just prior to the race, a paragraph appeared in a local paper, in the course of an article describing the peculiarities of the race sailed over a long course out of sight of land and during the hours of darkness, which said: "Such are the uncertainties and chances of this race, that even the old *Eureka II* might win."

On this trip the crew consisted of "Test," "Camel," "The Dog," and me, with the addition of Bob, whom I do not recollect having previously mentioned. He was a keen amateur sailor, in spite of a peculiar propensity for being seasick on almost all possible occasions. A thorough sportsman, he never refused to go on a passage. Though much older than any of the others, he was very active; his extra twenty years seemed to have treated him lightly. An incident during the same year aboard *Eureka II*, in this connection, impressed us very much at the time when it happened.

Robert, as he was often called, saw that the upper mast hoop of the mainsail was foul of the gaff jaws when the sail was almost fully hoisted, and proposed to lay aloft to clear it. Not thinking it desirable to allow him to attempt this, on account of his mature years, the height of the gaff from the deck being some twenty feet, I said that I would go. In spite of the fact that Bob was approaching his fiftieth birthday, he would brook no denial, and before any action could be taken to prevent him he was clambering aloft. Arrived at the gaff, amid shouts of "Be careful" from the

deck, Bob yanked at the hoop which was foul, and nothing happened. Robert took another and more powerful yank; the hoop cleared itself, and the resulting jerk tore Bob from his hold. Down he came, feet and arms in the air, crash on to the cabin roof in a more or less sitting position, amid yells of laughter from the rest of the crew. The sight was indeed comic. Of course, the luckless Robert might have been killed, but this did not occur to any of us at the time. As soon as we could speak for laughing, we inquired whether he was hurt, and were promptly assured that no serious damage had been done; even the cabin roof was still intact, he added. Except that Bob found but little comfort for the next fortnight or so unless standing upright he seemed to be none the worse for his adventure; but he had fallen on the only spot on which he could have landed without serious injury.

On the night of the race there was a light breeze blowing from the south-east, which was a following wind for vessels bound to the island from the Mersey. We got a good start, but, in spite of this, by the time we had the Bar Lightship abeam we were already more than two hours astern of the scratch boat, which was only allowing us that amount over the whole race. Obviously, therefore, our chance did not appear very rosy.

We watched the leading boats stretching away before the wind in the gathering darkness with their booms to port, and I noted that they were all following the scratch boat.

To my mind, the course they were steering was a full half-point too much to the northward, so I put a hand forward to report when he could no longer see our next ahead. Meanwhile we followed directly in the wake of the rest of the fleet, the crew being told to have everything ready and to stand by for a gybe.

At last the look-out reported that he could no longer see any sign of the fleet, so I sang out "Gybe-O!" Over went our boom to starboard, and we steadied on the new course a half point more to the westward. Then we set our spinnaker to port, hoisted our balloon headsail, and dropped our staysail on deck. The jib we left up, as it was possible that we might want it later, and to take it off would be rather an undertaking; also, as we were dead before the wind, it would not cause any great amount of interference with the other sails.

The spinnaker sheet was well slacked away, and any wind spilled out of the spinnaker was caught in the balloon headsail, which was lightly sheeted to starboard. With this large area of light canvas all full and drawing, and with our jackyarder aloft above our whole mainsail, the old cart tramped along to some tune, with the constant sound of rushing waters under her bows to cheer us on our way.

"The Dog" was sent forward to keep a look-out, for with the spread of canvas which we were carrying nothing ahead could be seen from the cockpit. Robert was instructed to sit on the spinnaker boom to keep it down, and the rest sat about aft to be ready to back the mainboom, or carry out any other duty as occasion might arise. Thus we settled down to a long run through the night, all alone, as we thought, and with nothing to do except watch Bob on the spinnaker boom being sick; this he started immediately after taking his seat on the boom, and kept on doing it almost continuously throughout the passage.

After about two hours of uneventful sailing, we sighted a red light just abaft our beam on our starboard side. We had thought we were alone, but in this we were apparently wrong. Who would the stranger prove to be? The red light got closer, and soon we were able to make out a dim shape behind it, which at length resolved itself into a large

yawl, which we identified as one of our competitors, who was allowing us over an hour on handicap.

That yawl seemed to dodge round us all night. First she was seen almost abeam to starboard; then she dropped astern; after which she closed in her red light and opened her green. In about half an hour she again caught up with us, but this time she was on our port beam, where she hung in more or less the same position, though sometimes closer and at others farther away, for perhaps a couple of hours. The wind then freshened a little, and she forged slowly ahead.

When clear ahead she crossed our bows, so that once more we saw her to starboard. Several times while darkness lasted she crossed and re-crossed our track, now to starboard, then again to port. Several times we observed that she gybed her mizzen, and this confirmed us in our opinion that she was steering erratically.

As dawn broke she was broad off on our starboard bow, only just to be observed as a shadowy form through the fog which had closed down with the arrival of daylight. Nothing was to be seen of any other unit of the fleet, nor was there any sign of the land, which at that time I calculated should be distant about five miles. Fortunately, just before day broke we had sighted the light on the Chickens, and also that at Castletown, of both of which we had been able to obtain approximate bearings.

By now the wind had died away to little more than a gentle breeze, and as the sun rose the fog lifted, revealing to us the rock at the entrance to Port St. Mary bay right ahead, and Langness Lighthouse on the starboard quarter; but more interesting, perhaps, than any of these, our eyes were gladdened with the sight of a string of yachts coming down from the northward, and rounding Langness Point a mile or two astern of us. As the sun mopped up the fog

and all these things became visible, our friend the yawl altered course, once again gybing her mizzen, to cross our bows for the last time. Would she, or would she not, be able to cross? She would, and did, but only just.

This allowed her to finish a few seconds ahead of us, thus depriving us of the glory of being the first boat in. However, we were quite satisfied with the result. We were able to finish, and then sail out quite a long way before we met our other friends entering. For their sakes, it was a pity that they had all followed the leading boat, instead of trying to find their own way across. On our part, we were pleased that they should act as they did, but we should have been still more pleased had we been able to avoid being sighted by the yawl, after congratulating ourselves on having successfully shaken off the whole fleet. However, it does not do to be too greedy, and even if the yawl did subsequently say that we had won because we had followed her through the hours of darkness, we were quite entitled to draw a parallel with the old fable of "The Fox and the Grapes" if we so desired, in spite of the yawl not appreciating the implied suggestion.

Lest there be any doubt as to whether one boat steered by the other or not during the night, it is, I think, only necessary to mention that our mainboom was to starboard, and our spinnaker full and drawing to port, until daylight broke, whereas the yawl gybed her mizzen on several occasions.

After watching the arrival of our competitors, we returned to the bay and came to an anchor, so that we might have breakfast in peace. I apologised to the crew for having kept them at it all night, so that nobody got any sleep, but explained that, as we had the wind aft and were carrying such a cloud of canvas, it was necessary that they should

stand by, instead of turning in as opportunity presented itself. Up spoke "The Dog" on this, saying:

"I don't see anything to grouse about on the score of getting no rest. I had a jolly good sleep."

"Oh!" said I. "And when did you manage to sleep?"

"Almost the whole way across," he replied. "I was on the look-out forward, but as there was nothing to see, and the staysail was stowed on the foredeck, I lay down in that, and slept very comfortably."

Had I known what my look-out was doing during that night passage it is more than likely that I should have felt less confident than was actually the case. Knowing that I had placed a look-out in the bows, and as nothing was reported by him, it was with a feeling that all was well that I carried on under full sail through the darkness, devoting the whole of my attention to keeping our vessel strictly to her course by compass.

The balance of the crew had not been able to get any rest, so immediately after breakfast we all turned in to snatch what we could before getting under weigh for home. About three o'clock in the afternoon, after having another meal, we made sail, and getting our anchor aboard started back for the Mersey.

The wind being still from the south-east, we had the prospect of a long turn to windward, and as there was not any great weight in the breeze, we went on sea watches, half the crew turning in while the other half looked after the ship. About sundown the wind died right away, and then came in—a lighter air—from the north. Before daylight a fog shut down, which persisted all the morning and well on into the afternoon.

About two o'clock we heard the horn of the North-west Lightship, and ran down until we reached a position, judged by sound, where, with our boat's head on the bearing of

the Bar Lightship from the North-west Lightship, the horn of the latter sounded directly astern.

Soon after this we were interested to observe close alongside a black line on the water, which looked as though it were caused by a tidal stream. On one side of the line the water was oily smooth, and appeared to be flowing towards the line and then downwards, as water runs when flowing in to fill a cavity, while on the other side of the line the water presented a jumbled-up and broken surface, and a noise of ripples was distinctly audible.

Somewhere before we had seen similar effects on the water, but for the moment we were quite unable to think how or when this was.

Keeping our eyes carefully on the line, we were shortly interested to see, appearing at the forward end of it, another black line, some three feet in length, almost at right angles to the first, but standing up vertically above it. Forward of this second line was to be faintly seen a darker section of fog.

For a moment there was a thinning of the fog, and the mystery was immediately cleared up. The first black line was the wake of a vessel under sail, and the second was the after edge of that vessel's rudder blade, while the darker section of fog was due to the vessel's rudder and a portion of her hull. The noise of ripples was caused by the water finding its way into the wake from the lee side of the rudder as she went ahead while carrying slight weather helm. Having solved the mystery, we bore away a little in order not to pass the vessel too closely, and shortly afterwards sailed through the lee of what proved to be a large two-masted topsail schooner. Her people seemed almost as much surprised to see us as we had been when we first sighted her. Before very long we lost her once more in the fog astern.

About half-past three I told "Test" to keep a look-out for the Bar Lightship, towards which we were heading. Just before four I saw the lightship directly ahead, and inquired from the look-out when he would report her. I mentioned to him casually that he should have seen her by now, as we had nearly run our distance. His reply was to the effect that there was nothing to be seen of her so far. On which I observed :

"You must be keeping a rotten look-out, or else you are looking in the wrong direction."

His next remark cannot be here set down in his own words, but the meaning was that he saw no use in keeping a special look-out when there was absolutely nothing but a highly coloured fog to be seen in any direction.

"Look ahead, and tell me what you see," I said.

He looked, and at once perceived the Lightship quite clearly, distant less than half a mile. This time I won't even try to give the approximate meaning of his remarks.

As we brought the Bar Lightship abeam, twenty-five hours after leaving Port St. Mary, without having sighted any land during that period, the fog cleared away. The rest of the passage back to our moorings up river passed without incident.

My crew were always rather casual, and never got rattled, no matter what might happen along. On one occasion we had entered a strange port in the dark, and had come to an anchor in about five fathoms of water at nearly high tide. Allowing for the known drop as the tide ebbed, we should have had six feet of water beneath our keel at low tide.

Before turning in, the usual precaution was observed of taking casts of the lead all round the ship. The result of these casts showed a constant depth of water at all points. About two o'clock in the morning I was aroused by feeling

our vessel take the ground. At once wide awake, I went on deck and sounded round with a boathook, only to find no bottom all along one side, while on the other there was less than five feet of water, though two hours of the ebb tide still remained, during which the water would continue to fall. Hailing the crew down the hatch, I said :

“ Better turn out. The ship is ashore.”

To this no reply of any kind was forthcoming from below. Trying again, I shouted down :

“ She is ashore on the edge of a shelf, and may fall over into deep water as the tide ebbs, so you would be safer on deck.”

At length, one sleepy voice replied, testily :

“ All right, give us a call if she does fall off. It’s too cold to come on deck to see her do it.” After that, a silence, unbroken except by snores ; not a word from any of the others.

Moving over any handy weights that I could find on to the landward side of the deck, and then standing on that side myself until she had taken sufficient list in that direction to make me reasonably sure that she could not get up and heel the other way, I went below myself, and was soon asleep.

When we turned out in the morning, we found that soon after anchoring the vessel had swung, and had tailed over on to the edge of a shoal, of the existence of which the soundings taken with the lead had given us no indication whatever. As to the behaviour of the crew during the night, they felt quite satisfied to leave me to take any action which I might think necessary on account of the ship, but turn out they would not to secure their own safety. Had I definitely told them to come on deck, they would have left their bunks at once, but with a suitable chorus of grumbles at the same time.

Sometimes I got some little part of my own back when dealing with the crew. In 1912 I particularly remember one time when we had just finished a race from the Mersey to Llandudno, in which we had been carrying our big balloon headsail. At the end of the race the wind freshened a good deal, so I decided to douse that particular sail. The crew had been really well soaked during the race down, and as they were feeling pretty miserable, instead of unbending the sail entirely and stowing it away below, they gathered it down on the bowsprit and stopped it there, just in case it should again be wanted. Then they retired below to change into dry clothes.

Soon the sea began to get up, owing to the action of the wind and tide, and before long *Eureka II* was plunging her bowsprit into each succeeding wave. Though doubtless the stopping of the sail on to the bowsprit would have held on well enough in the ordinary way, the plunging into the water caused the sail to work adrift. Observing this from aft, I hailed the crew to get the sail in and unbend it, as otherwise we would lose it altogether.

Out on the bowsprit, which, by the way, was a very long one, went our two foredeck hands, "Test" and "The Camel," in their dry clothes. Just as they got into position for handling the sail, *Eureka II* dipped her nose into an approaching sea, and our two hands were taken under water, which closed completely over their heads, so that they were lost to view from aft.

Manfully they stuck to their jobs until they had the sail handed and unbent and safely passed inboard. Then they slopped aft, grouching at me because they had got their only remaining dry clothes soaked through and through. From me they got but little satisfaction, as I told them that it was their own silly fault, for changing into dry clothes while they knew perfectly well that the sail was

still out on the bowsprit, from whence it would have to be brought in sooner or later. Not being able at the moment to think of any suitable or adequate repartee, they retired below muttering, from whence I soon roused them out once more to close reef the mainsail and take in the jib.

From then on it blew harder and harder, and we had a dead punch to windward in a rapidly rising sea. It was pitch dark before we reached the Menai Straits, and blowing half a gale of wind right in our teeth. Turning to windward up the Straits under those conditions was an anxious period for the helmsman, but it was also really hard work for the crew. They were thoroughly warm by the time we reached a safe anchorage and came to at two o'clock in the morning. By then, they had not a word to say, having completely exhausted their vocabulary several hours before.

Wrapping oilskins round us, we turned in, all standing, even with our shoes on, and when we got up in the morning our clothes were more or less dry. Only such dampness remained as was soon dried by the hot sun then shining.

The crew would certainly have been wiser had they waited, before changing into their last dry clothes, to see what lay ahead of them, but this kind of thing is a useful experience for a crew, and teaches them to do exactly what they are told when they are told, and not to grouse about it more than they can help. It has been my experience that the more a crew grouses the wetter it gets.

CHAPTER VII

SOARING AMBITIONS—IOMHAR—BRINGING THE NEW SHIP HOME

THOUGH *Eureka II* served us very well for a time, after two seasons with her we became tired of always having everything wet, and, in addition, we felt that as a crowd we had gathered sufficient experience with her to be able to handle fairly efficiently something more yacht-like. Accordingly at the end of 1912 we sold her, and at a price which showed a small margin of profit over and above the figure which we had paid. Having disposed of her, we had to find another ship, and this we eventually did at Penarth in the Bristol Channel early in 1913.

The new vessel was about as different in type from the old *Eureka II* as it was possible for a boat to be. Instead of being short and tubby, the new packet was long and slim; and in place of great width and relatively shallow draught, she was narrow and deep. She had extreme overhangs at each end. Relatively short on the water-line, her overall length was a full eight feet in excess of the dimensions of the old boat, while her bowsprit was tiny, instead of the huge spar to which we had become accustomed. She measured only nine tons, but carried three tons of lead six feet below her water-line.

When we bought her she had alternative rigs, one being that of a cutter, while the other converted her into a yawl. The mainboom of the yawl rig was fitted with roller reefing gear, making it very handy for cruising.

In April, the purchase having been duly completed, "Test," "The Dog," "Camel," Robert, and I, with another, Bill by name (often called William), went down to Penarth when the tides were suitable for launching, so that we might sail her round to the Mersey. Luck was against us; we stayed at Penarth for four days, during which time it blew continuously so hard that to launch was impossible. Eventually we were compelled to return to Liverpool without our ship. It was arranged before leaving that the late owner was to launch her on the first suitable tide and to hire a crew to take her round as far as Milford Haven, where we would join her.

On receiving a wire that she had actually left Penarth for Milford, away we went again to the latter place by train.

Arrived there, we found no trace of *Iomhar* nor any word of what had happened to her. Two days we waited before hearing any news. On the evening of the second day a wire reached us, saying that *Iomhar* was at Tenby, weather-bound, but that she might come on to Milford next day. At once we wired back asking that she should remain where she was, and saying that we would join her there. Actually, we were tired of waiting for her, and thought it would be better to go over to Tenby ourselves, as then it would rest with us to decide whether or not the weather was fit to continue the passage.

The next morning we reached Tenby, and found our vessel alongside a stone pier, high and dry. The tide was making, and she would be afloat in about two hours after our arrival. This gave us nice time to get in necessary supplies and water before sailing time.

The day was fine, with a light breeze and a smooth sea. Soon after we got away under yawl rig and were clear of the Bristol Channel before dark.

In spite of the sea being smooth, there was a gentle ground swell. This was only sufficient to keep *Iomhar* rolling ever so slightly, but enough to start the good Robert being seasick—the same member of the crew, you will remember, who had performed on the spinnaker boom of the old ship during the race to the Isle of Man.

The passage was a very slow one, owing to the lightness of the breeze, but we at length reached the Stack Lighthouse on the north-west corner of the Holyhead island as the evening of the second day was closing in. By this time I was beginning to feel alarmed about Bob, who had been making a noise not unlike a foghorn without intermission for the past thirty hours, being regularly and accurately mimicked by Bill, who deemed the troubles of Robert a subject for levity. To be seasick for that length of time was obviously most exhausting, and I thought seriously of putting into Holyhead in order to land Robert while he was still alive and send him home by train, as I hardly cared to take the risk of keeping him on board.

Arrived off Holyhead Bay, Bob recovered, and no more made evil noises, whereupon I took counsel with him as to whether we should go in and put him ashore or not. He scouted the idea that we should land him, as he was of opinion that his troubles were over, and that the remainder of the passage to the Mersey would do him no harm.

Not liking the look of the sunset, though the wind was at the time still light, I turned all hands to and reefed the mainsail. During this operation Robert was as energetic as any other member of the crew, and did his share with the best of them.

No sooner were we nicely snugged down with everything well secured in preparation for what might be in store for us, than Bob once again started his by now celebrated foghorn imitation, and kept it going—with accompaniment

by Bill—until we were well inside the Bar Lightship. We certainly had a good fresh breeze during the night, and as we approached the Bar quite a respectable sea had got up, but, strangely enough, after sighting the Bar, and long before we reached smooth water, the good Robert once more completely recovered, and was bright and lively from then onwards.

Of that night passage there is nothing interesting to relate, except that during the middle watch the mate, "Test," reported sighting the North-west Lightship broad on the port bow, and altered course in order to pass near her. Some time later he reported that he had made a mistake, and that what he had seen proved to be a steamer under way. In pursuit of that vessel he had altered course some eight points in all before discovering his error. The time that he altered course having been noted, it was a simple matter to set a new course by compass which would compensate for his deviation from the prescribed route, and before long we had the satisfaction of picking up the real Lightship exactly where we expected to find her. This action of "Test's" goes to show how inadvisable it is to alter course unless you are reasonably sure of what you are doing.

Please don't think that I have never made this class of mistake myself. I have. To mention a specific case, we were one day, during 1913, racing in Holyhead Bay in a good sailing breeze, but at the same time there was a dense fog. From the breakwater end we sailed out to a large steamer lying in the direction of the Stack, as she was our first mark; this mark had to be left to starboard. We found her without much difficulty, partly by accurate navigation, and partly because she was ringing her bell. Our race that day was the second event on the programme, and somewhere ahead of us in the fog we knew the big

class must be, as they had started some time before us. From the north-west mark, we had to go to a mark boat lying in Church Bay, which is a small indent on the east side of Holyhead Bay, and quite an appreciable distance south of the West Mouse, which is an island situated off the Head at the extreme eastern corner of Holyhead Bay itself.

Rounding the north-west mark in safety, away we went for Church Bay. The fog was thick as a blanket, but we carried on, keeping a bright look-out and blowing our horn at intervals. We heard the whistle of a passing steamer bound west, and saw and heard the wash under her bows, but of the vessel herself we caught not a glimpse.

When we had nearly run our distance, and I was just beginning to wonder whether by any chance I had made any error in my calculations, we heard on our port bow the foghorns of sailing vessels on the starboard tack. Almost immediately afterwards, through the fog ahead, we saw the yachts of the large class standing across our bows from port to starboard, close hauled on the starboard tack.

This sight decided me that I must have made an error. It seemed that the big chaps, who would have many expert navigators amongst them, must have been round the Church Bay mark, somewhere out on our port bow, and that when we sighted them they must be on the next leg of the course, from Church Bay to the breakwater end.

Accordingly, I altered course more to the northward, in order to make the place from which they had come. In this we were undoubtedly successful, but, to my horror, the first thing we saw was the West Mouse close aboard! Realising the mistake, we gybed at once, and close hauling on starboard tack, tried to beat back into the bay.

Luck was against us. Since the big chaps had started Church-Baywards from the Mouse the tide had begun to

run strongly to the eastward, and, as a consequence, we found ourselves quite unable to get back round the headland forming the eastern limit of the Bay. These conditions obtained for the next five hours, before the expiration of which period we had the mortification of seeing all races finished as the fog had cleared away in the interval. During the whole of that five hours we were beating to and fro in a constant endeavour to round the headland, but always with the same lack of success.

Had I not been fool enough to think that the big chaps must be better navigators than I, and in consequence altered my course, we should easily have been first boat of all those taking part in the regatta to round the Church Bay mark, not even excepting the largest yachts. This, then, is the result of lack of confidence.

Holyhead Bay is a curious place in which to race. Fog is frequently prevalent, and owing to the strength of the tides, local knowledge is most important if success is to be achieved. Also, due to the strength of the tides, there is usually a certain amount of sea running in the Bay; particularly is this so when the tide happens to be running against the wind. On these occasions a short sea gets up, which is very trying for a small vessel.

One day while we were racing at Holyhead there was just a nice working breeze, which enabled us to carry all our canvas, and a nasty short chop was running. Close hauled on the port tack, we were thrashing through it at a smart pace, throwing fine bursts of spray from our bows, when, chancing to look forward, I was interested to see "Test" disappear over the lee bow. All my crew had definite instructions that if they should happen to fall overboard to leeward from forward they were to make a grab at the lee runner when it came abreast, and that I would then manage to get them aboard.

"Test" remembered his instructions, and I soon had the satisfaction of seeing him grasp the lee runner as he drove past along our side. At the time we were travelling with our deck well in the water. As he seized the runner I put the helm hard down, thus swinging our stern to leeward and scooping him on to the deck. Coming up into the wind under the influence of the helm, the vessel righted herself, and by this means lifted the lee deck from the water, with him upon it like a newly stranded fish.

On completing this operation, a sound as of growling and grumbling became audible from directly behind me, and I recognised the voice of my mainsheet hand, who sat out on the quarter while racing. Without looking round, I said:

"What are you grouching about, aft there?"

The reply surprised me not a little. "I am soaked right through," said the voice.

"How the Dickens did you manage that? No great amount of spray can reach you on the counter."

"Spray be bothered!—it was no spray. I've been in the ditch."

"When was that?"

"Just now. I have only this moment got back."

"How did you get back? I had no idea that you had gone overboard."

"As I went I grabbed the slack of the mainsheet, and when you threw her up in the wind to pick up the mate, I came aboard along the sheet."

From this it appeared that in actual fact, and without my knowing it, I had two members of my crew in the water at one and the same time. However, the delay in picking them up was of such brief duration that we won our race in spite of everything, with quite a respectable margin of time in hand.

CHAPTER VIII

A SPORTING TRIP—DOUBTFUL FIRST IMPRESSIONS—AN ULTIMATUM—CONCORD AND HARMONY

RACING was in those days my main interest, but occasionally I did other things as well. An Engineer-Major friend of mine bought in 1913 a small sailing yacht of an overall length of twenty-eight feet, which was lying at Southport when he bought her, and which he wished to take round to the Clyde. With this object in view he approached me to find out whether I would accompany him for the voyage. The party was to consist of himself, myself, and one paid hand.

The paid hand was already aboard the vessel at Southport, and the Major told me that he was a yacht hand from one of the southern counties who had been most strongly recommended to him on account of his reliability and general trustworthiness.

I accepted the offer with alacrity, as I had nothing else of any special importance to do at the time, and we went over to Southport by train from Liverpool to join the vessel, which was lying with stores on board and ready to sail. My friend had been living on board for some days previously, and had only delayed sailing in order that he might collect me, or someone else, to accompany him.

When we arrived at Southport we found a strong breeze blowing, and were only just in time to get off to *Seagull*, as my friend's boat was named, before the tide covered the sandbanks and a considerable sea began to roll in,

which would have made boarding by means of the collapsible dinghy impossible had our advent been delayed by even half an hour.

As we got on board, *Seagull* began to plunge and kick about in a most uncomfortable manner, giving us a taste of what we might expect to experience until the tide should once more ebb sufficiently to uncover the protecting banks.

After we had had tea, I went on deck to have a look at the weather, which did not appear very promising. There were heavy clouds racing across the sky, and the horizon in the west was hard and clear. The glass was very low, but had apparently ceased to fall. I had seen enough to enable me to make up my mind that we were in for a harder blow, and that we would be well advised to remain at anchor where we were, at least until daylight, when my friend came and joined me on deck.

Taking me out of earshot of the cabin, he informed me that the paid hand, Tregarthen, had just acquainted him with the fact that he did not propose to accompany us to Scotland, and that he had requested to be put ashore. What was he to do?

My friend had spent much of his Army time in India, and I could see at once, when I got on board, that Tregarthen had not met the type before, and that he did not in the least understand him. Probably when I joined, Tregarthen took me for another Army man, and did not relish the prospect of so long a passage, in so small a boat, alone with two soldiers, who might prove headstrong when it came to deciding whether or not the weather was fit for getting under way.

Taking into account the sea which was then running, it was obviously not practicable to attempt to land Tregarthen that night. I therefore advised my friend to point this out to Tregarthen, but to agree to put him ashore during

smooth water time the following morning. No question of breach of contract of service was on any account to be mentioned.

Next morning the wind had eased somewhat, and with a steadily rising barometer the prospect seemed more promising. After breakfast was over, I said to the Major :

“ Go and tell Tregarthen that you are now ready to put him ashore, in accordance with his request, and ask him to please hurry, as we want to get under way as soon as possible.”

Away went my friend to convey the message, but almost immediately returned to say that he had tried it on Tregarthen, but that the paid hand had said that he did not now wish to leave. What did I advise him to do about it ?

To me, it seemed that the man had merely been scared on the previous evening, and that in the interval he had had an opportunity of getting to know us better ; and at the same time to suspect, having regard to the cool way in which his proposed desertion had been taken, we might not be such entirely impossible shipmates as he had at first supposed.

Accordingly, I advised the Major to say that he might go or stay exactly as it pleased him, but that, if he elected to stay, it must be on the distinct understanding that should he express an opinion without being asked for it, or grumble on receipt of an order, he would be immediately put ashore at the first port of call, and that there he would be left, to find his own way home as best he might.

When these terms were put to Tregarthen, he took no more than a moment in which to come to a decision.

“ I'll stop,” said he.

During the whole time that he remained with the ship, he adhered loyally to his agreement ; and the Major subsequently told me that the nearest approach he ever allowed

himself to criticism was only in the form of dumb show. If my friend should chance to pick up a berth for the night which Tregarthen did not deem to be a safe one, he would, without saying a word, on coming to an anchor proceed to put the jib in stops and hoist it up again, so that it would be ready for instant use if required, instead of following his usual practice, when in a safe anchorage, of unbending it entirely and stowing it away below. By this little exhibition, the Major always knew if Tregarthen disapproved of his selection of an anchorage, and, acting on the hint, would generally ask him for his views as to the advisability of shifting to another berth.

Our paid hand proved himself to be, after that first little difficulty, most satisfactory in every way.

The question of whether he was to go or stay having been definitely settled on that particular morning, I at once discussed with him what canvas we should set for the beginning of our voyage to Scotland, giving him at the same time the impression that I was quite unaware that any friction had occurred between him and the owner of the boat. Though not exactly talkative, I found him to be a pleasant fellow enough, and quite competent in his work.

There was still a fresh head wind, and this was knocking up quite a tumble of sea, so that, as it was better to be sure than sorry, we arranged to make our start under easy canvas, and see how we got on. If we found that the little vessel made decent weather of it, there would be no difficulty in setting more sail. We decided to try a pair of reefs in the mainsail, and a number two jib to begin with, but before setting the mainsail we took the precaution of reeving off pennants for the gathering down of our last reef, should this become necessary.

On sail being hoisted, some difficulty was experienced

in getting the anchor, owing to the wild way *Seagull* was plunging about. Sometimes she would go completely bows under in a specially large sea. At length, however, the anchor was aweigh, and I kept her more or less hove-to while anchor and chain were being stowed and all secured.

When quite ready to proceed, we filled away on starboard tack, and I was more than pleased to find what a weatherly little ship she was, and how very easily she carried her sail. Once clear of the banks and in the open sea, I suggested giving her the staysail, as I felt it would not unduly press her. With the greatest alacrity Tregarthen roused out the staysail, and bending it on the stay, hoisted it single-handed. A couple of hours afterwards, the wind having moderated, and the sea running larger and less steep, I tentatively mentioned that I thought she would bear the whole mainsail and a number one jib. To my considerable surprise, the idea was received almost with acclamation, and preparations were at once put in hand to carry it out. As soon as all was ready, I hove-to, and dodged along until the alterations had been made and everything was once more set up, when we squared away again for our long beat to windward.

Turning to windward is but a slow means of progression at the best of times, and therefore we were not greatly surprised to find that by the time darkness set in we were still some twenty-five miles from the Isle of Man. The sea had gone down until the water was almost smooth, and the wind had eased to such an extent that little more than a gentle air was now blowing. Fortunately, as the wind eased, so it veered. When darkness overtook us, the wind had veered sufficiently far to enable us to lie our course for the north-east end of the Isle of Man, while close hauled on the starboard tack.

There being nothing to do, and nothing to see, when

midnight came two of us went below, with the fond hope that we might get some sleep, leaving one hand on deck to steer and keep a look-out. It was arranged that, so long as the fine weather lasted, we would each in turn take two-hour spells on deck, as this would give us a four-hour watch below.

As is usually the case on the first night at sea, the watch below got but little sleep. Somehow, on these occasions, immediately one gets below, the desire for sleep, which has just previously seemed to be almost overpowering, takes to itself wings and flies away, leaving the would-be sleeper more widely awake than usual. Nevertheless, even if there is little sleep to be got, to lie down below is in a sense restful; also, it is certainly warmer below than on deck in the small hours of the morning.

Some people might think that the question of warmth should be unimportant, even at night, during these cruises undertaken in the summer months, but in this they would err. The hours of darkness, at sea in a small boat, even at midsummer, are, almost without exception, bitterly cold, and it is this cold which forms the greatest hardship that the amateur sailor has to endure when passage-making at night.

It must be remembered that the helmsman is seated, with no room to move about. He is practically without occupation in light weather, except for a continued effort to remain awake; consequently the cold is hard to bear. Probably, also, his clothes are more or less wet—particularly is this the case if there has been a good sailing breeze during the previous day. Wet clothes add very greatly to the general feeling of chill.

As the night passed, so the wind died away, until when day broke a flat calm stretched over the face of the water, as far as the eye could reach. This, by the way, was not

very far, as with the coming of the light a mist had shut down, which effectually limited the field of vision to less than one-quarter mile in any direction.

For perhaps an hour the calm lasted, and we could not tell with any certainty where we might be, or whither we might be drifting, though the last fix which we got before the mist shut in put us somewhere not very far from Ramsey Bay. With the rising of the sun a gentle air of wind came away from the southward, and this, assisted by the sun, effectually dispelled the mist.

Slowly the mist cleared away, and as it cleared the land was revealed not very far off on our port beam. This land we soon identified as being the Maughold Head, which is a prominent headland at the southern limit of Ramsey Bay. Fortunately, the tide was then setting towards the Point of Air, which is the northern extremity of the island, and the run of this tide, together with the gentle fair wind, carried us clear of the north end of the island by the time we had cooked and eaten breakfast.

After breakfast, the wind being still light and fair, it was "All hands make sail, and away for Bonnie Scotland!"

The jackyard topsail was dug out of its bag, in which it had been reposing since we left Southport, and after being duly bent on to its yards, it was hoisted, and added appreciably to our way through the water. Even then our speed was by no means impressive, so the spinnaker was got out. As we set the spinnaker the wind must needs freshen, and we were soon tramping along in fine style.

Somehow or other, the wind never seems to know that enough is as good as a feast, and that particular wind proved to be no exception in that respect. It continued to freshen, until we had to take in the spinnaker. The topsail we decided to carry as long as possible, for the reason

that it was only a small sail, and not very difficult to handle in daylight.

Across to the Mull of Galloway we sped, covering the twenty-one miles of water in under four hours; but as we arrived off the lighthouse on the Mull the wind once more got tired, and began to die away. There seemed to be no immediate sign of further wind, and the tide was about to turn against us. Under these circumstances, and knowing that Port Logan was close at hand, I suggested that we should try to get in there, and, if successful, go and have a look at the fishpond, of which I had heard so much, but which I had not as yet seen. We could anchor in the bay, and get some sleep, before clearing out on the ebb in the early hours of the following morning.

The idea was voted a good one, and once more setting our spinnaker, the last expiring puffs of the fast-dying wind wafted us to a good anchorage, so slowly that we had no more than bare steerage way.

The fishpond we saw during the afternoon, and found that it quite came up to our expectations, after which we returned on board, and, having had a meal, turned in for a much-needed sleep.

CHAPTER IX

A LUCKY LANDFALL—VICE VERSA—A THRASH TO WINDWARD— SMART WORK

WE weighed anchor and started north as day was breaking the following morning. A light southerly breeze was blowing, and the morning was grey and overcast, while the barometer had been steadily falling since the previous evening. Altogether, the prospects were far from being encouraging; still, the tide served and there was a working breeze, so nothing was to be gained by delaying the start. Port Logan was not a place in which to be caught in bad weather, for the reason that in certain winds there was not a vestige of shelter for even a rowing-boat while lying afloat.

We carried the tide with us along the land as far as the Corsewall Lighthouse, at which point we left the coast and headed away for Sanda Island, which lies at the southern extremity of Cantyre. Soon after settling down on to our course for the run across the intervening thirty miles or so of open water, the wind backed round to south-east and freshened somewhat, bringing with it a misty rain which completely shut out the coast. For all we could then see, we might have been a hundred miles from the nearest shore.

We experienced variable winds on the way across, varying in direction and in strength, but all the time in the east quadrant. This suited us very well, as the flood was running into the Clyde, and, flowing to windward as it was, tended to compensate for any leeway which we might make.

The weather remained thick, and the sea began to rise,

until the general situation appeared far from attractive. As the sea got up, our progress became somewhat slower, so that the flood tide finished and the ebb started to run before there was any sign of land to be seen. The wind backed round to very little east of north, thus making it difficult for us to lie our course.

We had nearly run our distance, by dead reckoning, so I called the Major to take the tiller while I went below to check off our estimated position on the chart. This done, I hailed the deck, and told them to keep a sharp look-out ahead, also to listen attentively for the sound of a bell, at the same time telling them that if we should have neither seen nor heard anything within the next ten minutes, we must throw the vessel round on to the other tack. I dared not carry on much longer on starboard tack, with the ebb running strong, for fear that we might miss Sanda Island, and even the Mull of Cantyre, altogether, and be carried out into the Atlantic.

After five minutes had passed, I was relieved to hear a hail from the deck, telling me that my friend could see something white just on the port bow; and almost at the same moment, Tregarthen reported from forward that he could hear the sound of a bell directly ahead.

“Round with her on to port tack!” I shouted, and round she came almost as I spoke.

Going on deck, I was immediately able to see Sanda Lighthouse, which was the white object sighted by the Major, and also the bell buoy moored near an outlying rock, the sound of which Tregarthen had reported.

We were lucky in our landfall, without a doubt. Full seven hours had passed since we had last sighted land, and the object for which we were steering was a relatively small one, and one which we might easily have missed.

As we went round, the wind freshened from the same

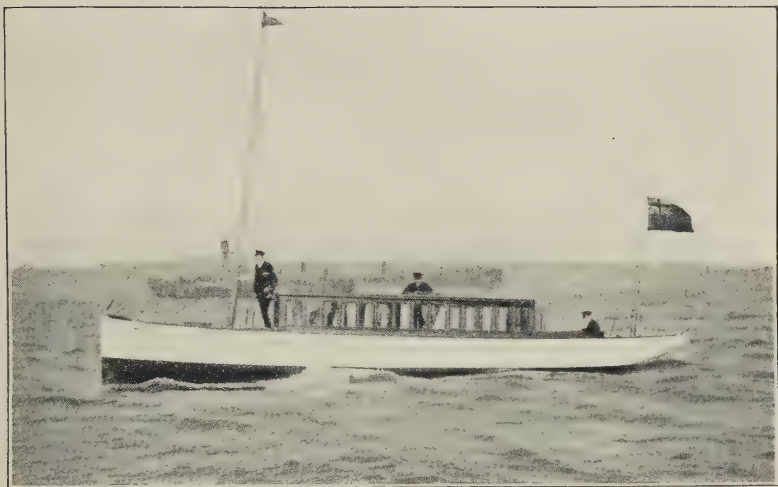
quarter, but I did not like to reduce sail, as we were plugging into the heart of a strong tide, and I did not dare to waste time reefing, but wanted to make as much to windward as possible so long as the little vessel would stand it.

Sticking to it manfully, we at length got abreast of Davaar Island, at the entrance to Campbelton. Then round we went again, bringing Davaar Island well under our lee bow. The little packet, though still making good weather of it, was hard pressed, and required careful handling to bring her over the breaking seas which constantly threatened to fall on her decks. To ease her, I hove her to for a moment, while Tregarthen dropped and secured the staysail. Filling away on her once more, she felt the relief due to the absence of the staysail, and boosted along over the seas like a little duck.

A smoke seemed to be indicated, so calling the Major to take the tiller, I went below and lit up. Perhaps I had been below for two minutes, certainly not longer, when, with a crash and a shudder of our hull, I heard a heavy sea land on board overhead. I heard the water rushing aft; into and round the cockpit it swirled, and quite a considerable quantity found its way into the cabin. Shortly afterwards the same performance was repeated, and a bleat came from my friend, suggesting that I had better come on deck and take charge of her again.

The boat did not belong to me, and, anyway, I had little more than started my smoke; therefore I politely declined the kind invitation to come on deck and get wet. To the best of my ability, I encouraged the Major from below, by telling him that he was doubtless doing all possible under the existing circumstances, and that I could see no special advantage to be gained by my getting wet as well as himself.

A really peaceful smoke soon became almost impossible, and I began to realise that if I were to stop below much



"DAIMLA."



H.M. EXAMINATION VESSEL No 3

longer I should have to bale, as the water was already washing about on the cabin floor. I dislike baling, so I made a virtue of necessity, and donning my oilskins again, went on deck to take over the tiller.

Certainly the sea was a nasty one, but very little worse than it had been before I went for my smoke. *Seagull* was soon again bobbing along over the seas instead of through them, and keeping her decks free of water.

My friend watched for a while without speaking, evidently thinking deeply as to how it could be that though the little vessel was so horribly wet under his hand she was comparatively dry under mine. Eventually he put his thoughts into words.

"What," said he, "is the procedure for keeping a boat dry under these conditions? I notice that she is dry with you, while with me she took almost every sea on board—at any rate, all the big ones without exception."

"There's no special catch in it; in fact, the business is quite simple," I replied. "If the sea is of an awkward type, such that your vessel will not get clear over when sailed straight ahead in the ordinary way, a sharp look-out to windward should be kept for specially large or hollow-faced seas. On the approach of these being observed, luff sharply. This will tend to slow the boat. Take the sea on the boat's shoulder, or something forward of that, according to the degree of steepness of the wave, always bearing in mind that the best angle depends on several different factors—the type of bow your vessel possesses, the speed at which she is moving through the water, the relative size and steepness of the sea, and on whether the wave is overfalling and crested or not. As the boat reaches the top of the wave, the helm should be put up so that she will pay off and, gathering way, slide easily down the back of the wave, instead of making a convulsive headlong

plunge into the next sea, which is exactly what would happen if you failed to put your helm up at the correct moment. Should you be too quick in putting up your helm—that is to say, before the boat has reached the crest of the wave—the sea will probably break across your after deck, and most likely fill the cockpit.”

“That explains my difficulty,” agreed the Major. “I knew that something of the kind had to be done, but I applied it in just the opposite way. On the approach of a sea I bore away, and as the wave came closer I luffed sharply, with the result that each successive wave swept the decks.”

“They would!”

Undoubtedly we would have made better weather had it been practicable to reef the mainsail, but to reef in the sea then running would have been a lengthy and difficult business. Also there would have been a grave risk of losing a hand overboard, owing to the way the little boat was jumping about. Under the circumstances, I decided to carry on as we were, and to depend on careful handling and on the soundness of the ship’s gear to keep us clear of serious trouble.

We thrashed along until we had Davaar Island dead to leeward, when, not caring to risk running before the wind with such a press of sail, I decided to take the mainsail off her. I asked the owner to come and take the tiller, so that I could go forward and give Tregarthen a hand to get the mainsail down. The Major would not hear of this, however; instead, he insisted that I should retain the tiller, while he would go forward and lend a hand with the sail.

This suggestion did not appeal to me, and I said as much. My fear was that my friend would fall overboard when he tried to make his way forward, and that we would then have the difficult job of retrieving him from the water. He assured me that there was no risk of his doing

anything of the kind, and as, after all, he owned the boat, I had no option but to agree to his wishes.

As he started to make his way along the weather deck, a specially hefty sea caught us under the starboard bilge, and our little packet, excellent seaboard that she was, gave a quick jump, and at the same time a spasmodic heave to leeward, thereby keeping the wave from breaking on board. The Major staggered, and fortunately fell to leeward, where he landed against the mainsail nicely within my reach. I grabbed him by the ankles, and gathered him into the cockpit, where I advised him to remain, in readiness to smother and secure the sail as it was lowered by Tregarthen from the foredeck.

Explaining that the whole operation of lowering and securing the sail would have to be carried out in a few seconds at most, I inquired whether all was ready for dowsing the sail. Receiving an answer from Tregarthen in the affirmative, I watched for a smooth, and finding a suitable one, luffed sharply into the wind's eye, at the same time shouting, "Down mainsail!"

Luckily, all the gear ran clear, and down came the mainsail in a heap on the boom, in less time than it takes to tell. As it fell, it was promptly smothered by the owner, subsequently to be secured without the slightest difficulty. The whole operation took less than ten seconds to perform, so that at the end of it, though heading into the eye of the wind, *Seagull* was still under the control of the helm. Once the sail was down and smothered, I put up the helm and bore away for the run down wind to Davaar Island, at the same time re-setting the staysail.

My shipmates seemed surprised that I should intend to run down wind under headsails only, as they thought we should be overtaken and pooped by the following seas. I tried to explain that, always providing a vessel remains

under complete control of her helm when running before a sea, the less sail she carries the better weather she will make of it. This idea seemed to be quite new to them, and at first they had no little difficulty in believing it, but as we continued to run before the wind in safety, and with dry decks, they learned from experience that what I had told them was true in fact.

The rest of the passage was completed without further incident of note, and we came to an anchor off the town of Campbelton at about seven o'clock that evening.

Perhaps I should have mentioned that when we joined the ship at Southport she was leaking sufficiently round the sternpost to make it necessary to pump her out at least every two hours. On the trip I became utterly bored with the leak, and during a spell of fine weather tried what I could do from inside with pieces of lampwick. Though not completely successful in stopping the leak, it was so much reduced by this means that a few strokes of the pump, at intervals of about eight hours, were all that proved necessary to keep her clear of water.

At Campbelton she was placed on the hard and carefully examined for the source of the leakage externally. Nothing being found which might account for the trouble, more lampwick was caulked in from inside, and after this she leaked not at all for the rest of that season.

Possibly the known presence of the leak may have had something to do with the reluctance of Tregarthen to start on the trip to Scotland.

I left *Seagull* at Campbelton, much to my regret, and made my way from there to Glasgow by public steamer, thence home by train. She was a nice little ship, and quite the best seaboat for her size that it has ever been my good fortune to meet; no racer, perhaps, but thoroughly dependable.

CHAPTER X

A FORLORN HOPE AND GREAT SURPRISE—WAR!

ON my return from Scotland I was just in time to take out *Iomhar*, then cutter rigged, for a channel race from the upper part of the Mersey round the Formby Lightship and back to the starting point. For that race the entries consisted mostly of boats larger and more powerful than ourselves. We had been making something of a reputation for ourselves in light weather races, and in consequence of this our handicap suffered considerably.

This particular race covered a distance of nearly twenty miles, and we were to receive only two minutes time allowance from the scratch boat, a powerful fifteen-tonner capable of carrying a considerable press of sail in a hard blow. The weather outlook before the race was rotten, from our point of view. A strong northerly wind was blowing, under which ran a big ebb tide. Even in the river itself there was a considerable sea, with white breaking crests.

I put it to my crew that in that sort of weather we had no earthly chance against the scratch boat, who would be able to save her time in the first mile. I saw no use in breaking our boat up by driving her to windward in such a sea, as we might want her again some day when the weather was more propitious. At the same time, I thought we ought to make a start, in order to show that we were not scared, and proposed that we should go under our small trysail, leaving the big boom mainsail safely stowed under its cover out of harm's way.

To the crew the suggestion seemed merely silly, but they agreed that it was no weather for us to carry our mainsail, and that perhaps it would be better to start under the trysail rather than not start at all.

We did not make any special effort to obtain a good start, but in spite of this we got away soon after the gun, and were among the first of the boats to cross the starting line. Most of the other boats were under double-reefed mainsails, but the scratch boat was not reefed at all.

For the first few minutes, in the relatively smooth water of the upper reaches of the river, the scratch boat went away from us very rapidly, but not for very long was this the case. Soon, as she met the larger waves, she began to plunge head under, so that her helmsman had to keep shaking her up in the wind in order to reduce her way and to give her a chance of rising to the seas instead of going through them. The other boats were overpowered from the very beginning, and none of them reached even so far as the entrance of the river.

We, on our part, got along fairly comfortably, and at a good average speed, until New Brighton was reached, by which time all but the scratch boat were far astern. The waves were certainly large and steep. As an instance of this, and of the weight of the wind, I may say that as we approached New Brighton I saw a bundle of straw floating in the river; next time I saw that straw it was stuck up between our flag halliards and the mast, at our extreme masthead. How it got there I don't know, but at the time some of the waves which broke against our weather bow were passing clean over the trysail gaff, in the form of spray, on their passage to leeward. Possibly the straw may have been carried aloft by the spray, but, in any case, the straw was still at the masthead when we finished the race.

Just after passing New Brighton I was a little careless in my handling of the vessel. In passing over a particularly large wave I put the helm up a trifle too soon, with the result that about the upper two feet of that wave broke clean across our afterdeck. It carried with it "The Dog," who was acting as our mainsheet hand, and unshipped the boom from the gallows on which it had been secured. Fortunately, as he was being carried away our "Dog" grabbed hold of the mainboom, and to this he clung, making it only a matter of moments until we once more had him back on deck. The gallows and mainboom were soon secured, and after this there were no more excitements.

Before very long the scratch boat gave up the race and returned home, she being quite unable to carry the press of canvas which she was showing. This left us the only survivor of the fleet which had started with such confidence less than an hour before. To say that we were surprised would be putting it very mildly. We certainly never thought, when we made our start under a trysail, that there was even a remote possibility of our securing a prize, much less that we should win the race. Yet here we were, merry and bright, with the game entirely our own, to play as we pleased!

Needless to say, when all our competitors had given up the race, we did not drive our vessel unduly, but nevertheless, we completed the whole course in well under four hours. Good going, when it is remembered that the first third of the distance consisted of solid punching dead to windward in a very heavy sea. It was a case of reliability winning the day; only the fact that we were well snuggled down from the start enabled us to stay the course.

In August 1914 we were away in *Iomhar* and spent the Bank Holiday week-end down the Menai Straits. Rumours of war were flying round and the whole atmosphere was

tense. Then the news came that war had been declared, and we at once hurried back to our home port.

On all sides the opinion was expressed that a modern war could hardly last beyond a few weeks at most. Therefore we put *Iomhar* on her moorings, instead of having her hauled out of the water, so that she would be handy for us to resume our interrupted holiday the moment the war should be over. Meantime, our crew set about looking for war service; the majority had joined up by August 6th.

Personally I was keen to get afloat if possible, where my knowledge of small boat work and navigation might be useful. As luck would have it, I heard that men with local knowledge of the ships and port of Liverpool were wanted for service under the War Office, to examine vessels wishing to enter the port from sea. Together with "Test" and "The Dog" I applied to the Chief Officer in charge of this service, and we had the good fortune to be at once accepted, and sent to join our ships the same day. Others of our crew joined the Army, and of them we saw but little until the war was ended.

CHAPTER XI

PORT EXAMINATION SERVICE—OUTLINE OF OPERATIONS—
CLOSE SHAVES—A BROKEN BACK—BETS AND BUMPS

THERE were four ships engaged on the Examination Service at Liverpool, and these were stationed in the open channel outside the entrance of the river. Though some of them were in positions where they were sheltered from the full force of the seas when the tide was low, they were all without shelter of any kind around high water if the wind was anything from north, through west, to about south-west. These vessels were normally kept under weigh, never being allowed to anchor except on occasions of dense fog. Each had her appointed station in the channel, where she had to remain until relieved by one or other of her sisters.

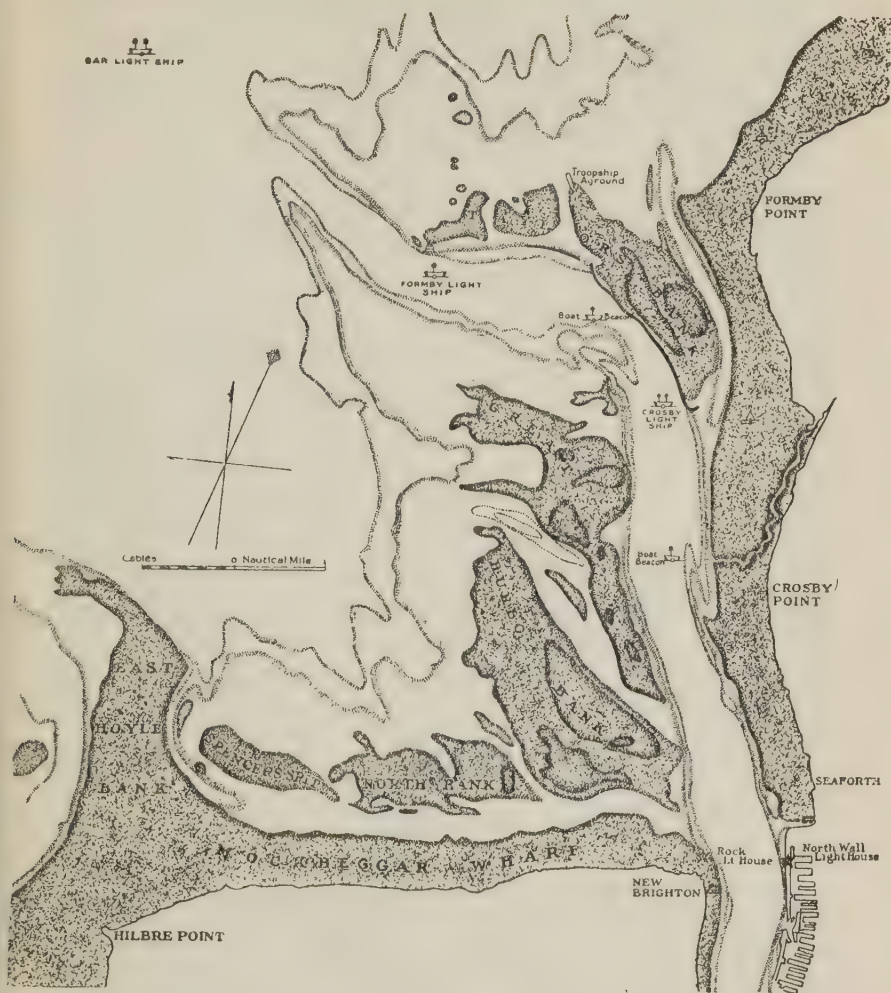
The outer boat of all was stationed at the Bar, and she would board a pilot and obtain leading particulars of the incoming vessel for transmission to the next boat, the duty boat of the service, who, when the incoming ship reached her, would send an examining officer on board, the ship being meanwhile hove-to or anchored under the guns of the shore batteries as the examining officer might direct.

Certain vessels passed in and out almost daily, and both they and their personnel were well known to the Examination Service. In these cases it was the custom to pass the vessels through with the least possible delay once they were fully identified and their innocence established beyond question. Strangers and foreigners were subjected to much more

detailed examination. Suspicious cases were made to anchor, and officers from the third, or inner, boat would be sent on board to carry out a detailed search. The third boat also had the responsibility of stopping any vessel which might run past the duty boat before she got through the anchorage. The fourth boat was a spare vessel, retained to relieve each of the others in turn. All the craft were full-powered steamers, and, as such, required to return to port for bunkers from time to time. The outermost boat transferred her examining officers to one of the pilot vessels when she returned to port for coal, thus leaving the fourth boat free to attend to relieving the boats on the two inner stations.

The relief took place soon after noon each day in the ordinary course of events, so that a vessel would be forty-eight hours on station, and then return to port for coal. The third twenty-four hours would be spent in port, except for the time occupied in the afternoon returning from sea, and that on the following morning in making her way out to her station. Periodical boiler cleaning was required by the vessels, and when this became due for one ship, the other two vessels would remain continuously on station for nine days at a stretch, except for a quick run in and out by the inner boat for coal and water once during that period.

Each vessel carried four examining officers, and while at sea on station these kept watch and watch, four hours on and four off, in pairs. One vessel worked six-hour watches instead of four, but I am bound to say that, though I served in her for a while, I was never attracted by the arrangement. Possibly it may be very nice to have the two extra hours of watch below, but this advantage is, in my opinion, more than outweighed by the extra two hours on deck. Six hours on deck at a stretch, particularly during the winter months, seems to be a very long time.



LIVERPOOL BAY.

The vessel on the duty station was relieved by the inner ship every six hours, the idea being to give the boats' crews engaged in boarding something of a rest, most of the boarding in the ordinary way being carried out by the duty vessel. The ship on the duty station was for the time being the responsible vessel, the others being under her orders.

Life on that service was for most of the time rather dull, but during the three years which I spent in it certain incidents of passing interest took place.

Once, while serving in No. 3 Examination vessel, we were at anchor in a dense fog when we heard the whistle of an outward-bound steamer approaching from directly astern. Our bell was kept ringing, but the sound of the whistle came nearer and nearer, until suddenly, almost directly above us, as it seemed, we saw the masthead light of a steamer. We heard the hail of the look-out on her forecastle when he reported a vessel directly ahead, and almost instantly the clang of her telegraph gongs became audible as her engines were rung full astern. Straining our eyes through the fog, we discerned the towering steel stem of a large vessel almost into us, and at the same moment a hail reached us from her bridge.

"Can you go ahead, sir?" it inquired.

Though our anchor was down at the time, our engine-room staff were standing by. Fortunately, we were lying to a good scope of chain. At once we rang for full speed ahead, and got it. Before we reached the limit of our cable, the other vessel had ceased to approach, and all danger was over, but not before that mass of steel had reached to within three feet of our stern. Her own unaided efforts would not have enabled her to clear us, it was only the sudden spurt ahead on our part which avoided a collision.

On another occasion in the same ship we were under weigh, facing the flood tide, during misty weather, when out of

the mist suddenly appeared a fast single-screw passenger steamer, heading straight for our mainmast. On seeing us, she went astern on her engines, but this action caused her head to cant, so that it seemed she must strike us almost amidships. It was obviously impossible for her to get her way off in the distance which then separated the two vessels. Luckily her captain remained cool and collected. Weighing up the chances, he saw that there was only one method by which he might avoid sinking us, and even this was a big risk to take, but he took it. He rang his engines full speed ahead, and put his helm hard astarboard in the hope of throwing his ship's head clear of our stern. Would she clear, or would she not? That was the question. Meanwhile we went full speed ahead on our own engines, to try to get out of the way.

Watching her carefully, I saw that she would very nearly clear us, but thinking it better to be on the safe side, I pressed down a switch in our wheelhouse, thus ringing an alarm bell in each compartment of our vessel to warn the watch below. Two or three seconds after I had rung the alarm the steamer struck our quarter with her starboard anchor. Practically no damage was done, though our vessel trembled all over and took an appreciable roll as the result of the blow. Actually the alarm need not have been rung, as matters turned out, but it was a close call all the same.

Again, during the night and at slack water we were lying, all stopped, beam on to the wind, when a large inward-bound steamer made to cross our stern in order to speak us. Some sea was running at the time, and as the vessel got close to us she suddenly broke her sheer and headed straight for our engine-room. Seeing that she was bound to cut us down unless we could get out of her track, we immediately rang for full speed ahead, and at the same moment ordered our helm hard aport. The vessel was approaching on our

starboard side, and we hoped by this helm action to swing our stern clear. Our engineers were on the alert, and promptly gave the engines full steam; they appreciated, from the unusual character of the order, that something urgent must be afoot. Instantly our little vessel responded to the thrust of her propeller and to the influence of her port helm, and it was well that she did so, for that great steamer lumbered by less than ten feet from our stern, quite as close as was pleasant in the sea then running.

Once, when the weather was misty, we saw a laden steamer of perhaps five thousand tons approaching us from a position where she had no right to be. Owing to the mist, we did not catch sight of her until it was too late to warn her of her danger, and she went ashore on a dangerous sand-bank. The flood tide had ceased to run by the time she took the ground, and I regretted to see her going full speed astern on her engines, as I realised that should she fail in her efforts to get off that tide she would lose the number of her mess. Going astern on her propeller, she was piling sand under herself and, as the level of the water fell, she would be hung up by the middle on the hump of sand so formed.

At about two hours ebb, though she was distant from us fully half a mile, we could tell that her end was approaching, and that she was beginning to break. To cut a long story short, she never got off the bank, but broke her back completely during that first ebb, and afterwards sank daily deeper into the sand. For some days after she went ashore the water remained smooth, and salvage parties, working day and night, managed to save part of her cargo of grain, but sand and water defeated them in the end. Gradually she sank in the sand, and each time the tide rose it came just a little higher, until at length it flooded all the holds, and completely spoiled the grain which still remained undischarged.

Personally, I am of opinion that had she not reversed her engines when she got ashore, in the attempt to get off again, it is more than likely she would have survived the first ebb tide, and she might have got afloat again with the assistance of tugs at the next high water. Where she grounded, the sand was fairly flat, and had it not been disturbed by her propeller, she might have borne the combined weight of herself and cargo without breaking.

Many other groundings I saw while on that station, but this was the only vessel which I remember to have been completely lost in that part of the channel. Strandings, collisions, and wrecks occurred in plenty, but in all other cases the victims were subsequently salvaged.

To watch incoming ships, particularly in bad weather, was frequently most interesting, and with long practice some of us acquired a very complete knowledge of the sandbanks and of the waters surrounding us. The channels lying between the buoys presented no great difficulty, as we were constantly using these ourselves, and in them was always to be found a fair depth of water, even at low tide. Outside the buoyed channels, the sandbanks were of irregular formation and of varying heights. At certain states of the tide it was possible for vessels of moderate draft to enter and leave the port by taking short cuts across the banks, instead of following the prescribed channels. After a while, we got so used to observing the banks at low water, and noting the high places in reference to buoys and other fixed objects, that we could tell almost exactly, when observing a vessel taking a short cut, what water she had beneath her.

One day I observed a large foreign schooner, laden with timber, approaching us from seaward, at an angle which made it certain that she would pass over a place where there would not be sufficient water to float her. At the time there was a strong breeze blowing, and quite a considerable

sea was running, which would make things most unpleasant for any vessel which should accidentally take the ground. Drawing the attention of my watchmate, a deep sea ship-master, to the schooner, I remarked :

“ If that chap carries on as he is at present heading, he will strike the bank before he reaches the channel.”

“ Nonsense ! ” replied my watchmate. “ He knows perfectly well what he is doing ; otherwise he would not try to cross the bank instead of coming round by the channel.”

“ All right,” I retorted. “ I’ll bet you a bob he touches on within five minutes.”

“ Done with you,” said he, feeling quite sure that I was making a mistake, and pulling out his watch to take the time. “ For you to win my bob, he must strike before noon.”

“ Yes,” said I, “ that is about the size of it.”

Four minutes had passed, and on sailed the schooner, running steadily before a following wind as though she had not a care in the world, and thinking nothing of possible danger. Four and a half minutes had passed, when my watchmate turned to me with a grin, and said :

“ Well, you’re wrong this time, and you will lose your money.”

“ Watch her. Watch her,” was my only comment ; and as I spoke, the schooner struck hard on the bank with her keel and brought up all standing. The following sea broke against her stern and swept her poop. As each sea struck and swept her she lifted slightly, and carried onward perhaps for half her own length, until once again she struck the bank with a crash. Her masts must have been good and well stayed, otherwise they would of a certainty have been carried out of her when first she struck, but they held on, and after about five crashes she got over the bank and reached the channel.

As I mentioned, she was loaded with timber. Some of



EXAMINING OFFICERS OF H.M.X.V. No. 3.



A NORWEGIAN BARQUENTINE.

this she had on deck, and a part of it was washed overboard and lost when she struck. That which was stowed below helped her to float until she could be towed into port and run on the beach. She broke her sternpost and damaged her rudder with the first shock, and subsequently started many of her seams and butts, so that she made water rapidly. But for her cargo of timber, she would never have reached port.

This incident is brought in here to show that we sometimes saw interesting happenings, and that we were not always unanimous as to the probable sequence of events.

During a south-westerly gale one day, a little foreign brigantine was trying to beat into port. Every time she stayed she obviously lost ground, until at last she drove ashore on the east bank of the channel. The tide was ebbing fast, and each succeeding wave which struck her had less force than the one immediately preceding it. I offered to take a boat in and try to pick off the crew, but at the same time explained that, provided the vessel did not break up in the interval, her crew would soon be able, owing to the fall of the tide, to make their way in safety to the shore by crawling out on her jibboom end and dropping down from it to the beach. The senior officer of the ship in which I was then serving decided not to risk a boat and crew under the circumstances, particularly as the neighbouring lifeboat stations had already been advised of the wreck.

In due course down came the lifeboats, only to find on arrival that the crew of the brigantine had got safely ashore by their own efforts, the tide having fallen far enough to allow of their landing on the beach. The brigantine herself suffered but little damage, and after being neaped for about ten days, was floated on the next big tide and towed into port by the Harbour Authorities.

CHAPTER XII

FOG AND ITS VAGARIES—A PROPHEPIC DEDUCTION— A DEAD HEAT

DURING fog all kinds of vessels were constantly getting ashore in all sorts of strange places, but they usually got off again on the next flood tide, either with or without outside assistance. Fog was the cause of most of the strandings and collisions, either on account of lack of visibility or because of a curious screening effect which fog causes in relation to the signals of lighthouses and lightships. A fog signal may be heard plainly in one particular position on a quiet day when there is no wind, while at a point a few hundred yards away not a sound can be heard.

Sometimes the fog lies in banks of a certain definite thickness, perhaps dense from the surface of the water for a height of thirty or forty, or more, feet above it, and clear above; or, on the other hand, it may be possible to see a considerable distance when the observer is placed low down, and impossible to see beyond a yard or two if his eye be more than ten or fifteen feet above the sea level.

One foggy morning, from a distance of about three miles we heard the North Wall lighthouse at the entrance of the river blowing its foghorn most regularly and clearly, and at the same time noticed the whistle of a large steamer approaching the lighthouse from seaward in a position where she ought never to have been. Soon the regular single long blast of a steamer making way in fog changed to the two long blasts of a vessel under weigh but having no way

upon her ; these again to be almost immediately followed by calls for a tug, and identification signals, from which we inferred that the vessel needed assistance. Steps were at once taken to secure help, and when the weather cleared it was found that a steamer of some twenty thousand tons had passed us in the fog on the outside of the Burbo Bank, and that she was hard and fast aground at a place within little more than a mile and a half of the lighthouse whose fog signals we had heard. Though the steamer had listened most attentively for any sounds while approaching the port, she had heard absolutely nothing—this in spite of the fact that there was no wind, and that when she grounded she was only about half as far from the lighthouse as were we, and only on a slightly different bearing. Next tide she got off the bank and safely reached port, having suffered little or no damage. This was a case of the peculiar screening effect of fog, which made sounds clearly audible to us inaudible to the other vessel, though she was so much nearer to their source.

I have said that fog sometimes lies in banks at a certain height above the water, and that it is possible to see quite a long way, provided the observer is sufficiently near the sea level. As an instance of this I will only mention one case, which remains in my memory for fairly obvious reasons.

Walking the quarterdeck of No. 3 about half past eight one morning, during a fog which was dense above and thin for some feet from the surface of the water, I was interested to sight the stem of a large outward-bound Atlantic liner close to our starboard quarter. The tide at the time was making, and we were steaming slowly, facing the tide and keeping station on the west side of the channel. When the outward-bounder identified us, she appreciated that she was on her wrong side, and flapped slowly away in a north-easterly direction, to come to rest again on the east side of

the channel, still clearly to be seen from our deck as to the lower portion of her hull. From the line of her maindeck upwards she was completely blotted out by the fog. There she lay from about eight thirty-five, blowing at intervals two long blasts on her whistle, to indicate that she was under weigh but all stopped.

About eight-forty the whistle of another large vessel was heard directly astern of us, and shortly afterwards the stem of one of the cruiser squadron was seen emerging from the fog close to on our starboard side. As she sighted us she appeared to alter course, and, proceeding very slowly, also moved off towards the north-east.

It was now my watch, and even from our bridge I could still see the Atlantic liner all stopped on the east side of the channel, and could hear her two whistles at short intervals. Just before nine o'clock it occurred to me that though we could see and hear both vessels, it was quite likely that they were each unable to see the other, and that possibly they would fail to hear each other's whistle signals. Accordingly I remarked to my watchmate :

"It is more than likely that there will be a collision between those two blokes. I don't believe that they will see or hear each other. Listen carefully for a crash."

We could still see the liner, but the cruiser was almost lost in the fog, which was thicker a few lengths further south, so that though we could still see her, it was not possible to judge with accuracy how far the two vessels might be apart. Listening most carefully, we soon heard a crashing sound, and knew from this that what we had feared must have taken place. Ringing for full speed ahead, we dashed off to see whether we could be of assistance.

A strange sight met our eyes as we arrived at the scene of the collision. The liner was slowly moving ahead, and the cruiser had slight sternway. The port side of the liner's

boatdeck was one mass of wreckage; bits of boats were lying about, and all the davits and other fixtures along that side of the deck were twisted, bent, and broken into every conceivable shape. It appeared that the two vessels were almost abreast, and very close together, when they first sighted each other. Each acted at the same moment. The liner went full speed ahead in an effort to get clear, and the cruiser reversed her engines. The attempts were not successful. It so happened that the cruiser had her starboard bow gun trained outboard at the time, and this gun passed over the boatdeck of the liner, just under her navigating bridge. As the liner moved ahead, and the cruiser astern, the gun was pulled the whole length of the boatdeck, and swept everything in its path. Stout davits broke or twisted, boats crumpled up like matchwood, ventilators disappeared and were not, and rails and such light fittings were trampled down like a field of hay is flattened out when subjected to a hailstorm.

As the vessels swung together, the starboard anchor of the cruiser, which was hanging from the hawsepipe, was driven through her own bow, making a large hole in her plating, and shortly afterwards the starboard propeller of the cruiser holed the plating of the liner in her port coal bunkers. Not to be outdone, the liner, in passing ahead, put a hole through the side of the cruiser with her port propeller, and this was the situation as we found it.

Both vessels were making water rapidly, and it was at once seen that they must return to port as quickly as possible. Our little ship could not render much service as a tug, and we therefore called up one of our other vessels to assist in towing, while we ourselves returned to duty. There was no danger of either vessel sinking immediately, so we were not called upon to save life.

Both the damaged ships safely reached harbour, and

were docked the same tide, but had little time to spare, as each one took the ground almost at once after getting into dock.

Though we were Government vessels, entrusted with special duties which we had to carry out, there were times when we had to render services outside of our normal routine in order to assist the smooth working of shipping in the vicinity of the port. On the whole, our work was not very arduous, and as it went on more or less in the same way month after month, it often seemed dull. Still, looking back at it, there is no doubt that the work had a sporting interest, and often weather conditions were by no means those which one would choose for a pleasure jaunt.

CHAPTER XIII

A NICE MORNING AND A NICE SITUATION—TAKING CHANCES

WELL I remember having the night watch on No. 5, the then duty vessel—the one vessel in the service which kept six-hour watches—in the small hours of one January morning when the thermometer stood at twenty-six degrees of frost, and the fog was so thick that it was not possible to see more than about a length of our own vessel in any direction. Keeping watch under these conditions was far from pleasant, and I was just wondering why I ever took a job afloat, when a small steam vessel emerged from the fog, and, hailing us, said :

“ There is a large steamer ashore on the back of Taylor’s Bank, and we think she has troops on board.”

After adding the approximate bearing on which the stranded steamer was lying, and telling us the distance which she was from the channel, our little friend disappeared into the fog, and was no more seen.

Here was a pretty kettle of fish ! We knew that several large vessels carrying troops were due off the port, and that it was probably one of these that had run aground. Her Captain would be by no means sure of his position, and there might easily be panic among the troops if assistance were not known to be at hand.

Under the circumstances, we wirelessly to the authorities ashore, giving the reported position of the troopship and asking for tugs and salvage craft to be sent

as soon as possible. At the same time we advised that we were proceeding to investigate, to check the position, and to offer assistance if such should prove to be required.

Having sent these signals, we approached the Master of our vessel and requested him to go at once to the position indicated, as we understood that a troopship was ashore there and might need assistance. We were rather non-plussed when the Master said :

"It can't be done. You cannot expect me to find my way round to that position at the back of the bank in this fog, and with a big tide ebbing so strongly."

"Why not?"

"I can't navigate and set courses, and at the same time take care of the ship and keep a proper look-out. But if one of you gentlemen cares to undertake the navigation, I am perfectly willing to carry out your instructions."

"Very nice. If we pile the ship up in our efforts to reach the stranded vessel, you will immediately round on us, and say that we took charge over your head."

"No," the Master said. "If you are unfortunate enough to get my ship ashore, I should merely report that you had done your best, and that the accident could not have been avoided under the circumstances. Also that you took over the navigation at my request."

It being quite evident that if we wished to get to the stranded troopship we must make the effort ourselves, the second vessel on station was called up to take over duty, and away we went.

The ebb tide was running at about three knots, and the level was falling about six feet each hour. According to the latest chart on board, we might have just sufficient water to cross the intervening sandbank and go direct to the stranded vessel. To do this successfully it would have been necessary to take our vessel through a very narrow gap in

a stone revetment which lay between us and the sandbank, and this was a greater risk than we cared to take. Owing to the density of the fog, it would have been most difficult to fix our position with any certainty, and should our vessel touch the stones with the strong tide then running, she would almost inevitably be totally lost. The alternative was to steam round the bank and to trust mainly to dead reckoning for our position.

No other vessels would be under weigh, on account of the fog, so we proceeded with both our engines working at full power, with extra look-outs posted on each bow, and with leadsmen standing by to sound. Down channel we rushed, helped by the tide, until we reached a bell buoy which marked the toe of the bank. Then, altering course as requisite, we ran along the back of the bank and parallel with it, still at full speed, until we estimated that we had reached a point some half a mile on the up-tide side of the place where the troopship was stated to be. Turning through eight points towards the bank, we steamed at right angles to the bank, and across the swift-running ebb tide, keeping the lead going the whole time. The Master inquired what purpose the lead served while travelling at full speed, as there was no chance of getting the bottom.

"Never mind about that. You will get bottom right enough when we reach something less than five fathoms."

Soon came the cry of "Mark seven," almost immediately to be followed by "Mark five!" This time the sounding was given by the leadsmen almost with a shriek, so great was his excitement at finding the soundings shoaling so rapidly.

Noticing the hand of the Master creeping towards the engine-room telegraphs, we called out to him :

"All right, Captain, keep her going : plenty of water yet."

You might think twenty-six degrees of frost to be a low

temperature, but, believe me, we did not find it so. By now the perspiration was streaming from the navigating department, and I doubt not that the rest of the crew on duty were affected in much the same way. It was exciting, tearing through the fog, and hoping against hope, not only that the soundings on the chart might prove to be correct, but also that no mistake had been made in setting the courses, or in calculating the distance run, or the set and drift of tide; or, again, in working out the reduction to soundings.

That the crew should be perturbed could not surprise anybody, as they had no idea whither they were speeding. All that they knew for certain was that we were out of the channel, that the fog was dense, that we were going at full speed, and that the soundings were shoaling very rapidly.

The next cast of the lead showed better water.

"And a half six!" was the cry.

A gasp of relief from the crew. But their relief was only of momentary duration. Almost immediately, "Mark five!" followed by "Deep four!" shattered their remaining nerve.

The time for action had now arrived, and leaning over the rail of the flying bridge, we told the Master:

"On the instant that you get three fathoms, stop, and go full astern both engines."

We drew twelve and a half feet aft, and therefore it will be appreciated that we were cutting things fairly fine by allowing our vessel to run into three fathoms before checking her. As soon as we were at rest, we took an up-and-down cast of the lead, and found that we were in sixteen feet of water.

Our wireless operator had heard the stranded vessel calling the shore stations, and had noted her call sign. We instructed him to call her up, and ask her to blow her whistle. The Master asked where we thought the troop-

ship should be, and to this we replied that if our calculations were correct, and also the position first given to us, she must be very close to on our port bow.

We all listened carefully, and within a few moments were almost deafened by the blare of a powerful steam whistle just off our port bow.

“Slow ahead starboard!” “Stop!” And we were lying close under the quarter of a large steamer. The position was evidently exactly as it had been given to us by our little friend, and presumably our dead reckoning had been fairly accurate. For a solid hour we had been steaming at full speed through the fog, and at last complete success had crowned our efforts.

We told the Captain of the troopship exactly where he lay, and also informed him that we had sent for tugs and salvage craft to assist him off when the flood tide should make. He requested that we should stand by him. However, as by then we had less than two feet of water beneath us, we explained that we should have to move off into deeper water for the present, but would remain within call so that we would be on hand if required. Having confirmed the position to the authorities, we turned right round and steamed out seaward, until we reached a depth of water sufficient for us to lie afloat, and there anchored until the flood should make.

By daylight, tugs and other craft arrived at the ship, and at high water, though the fog was still dense, they got her off the sandbank and back into the channel. She eventually reached port and landed her troops in safety just ahead of the other vessels of the same convoy which had not had the misfortune to get ashore.

Our organisation received thanks from the authorities for the special service which they were kind enough to say we had rendered so efficiently.

CHAPTER XIV

SUBMARINES AND MINES—"ACCIDENTAL"—A DESTROYER'S ERROR

AT times enemy submarines were reported in the vicinity of the port, and we would be sent out on patrol. What we were supposed to do in the event of sighting one of these pests did not transpire, and when on these expeditions we always devoutly hoped that no underwater boat would happen along in our direction. Actually, we never saw one, but our outermost ship was lost with all hands, except two, in consequence of striking a mine, laid by a submarine during the hours of darkness, just inside the Bar Lightship. When she had gone, the other vessels of our service took it turn and turn about to keep station in the neighbourhood for the purpose of warning inward-bound shipping to keep clear; this continued until the minesweepers had thoroughly swept the area where our friend had been lost.

Keeping station day and night in a spot where mines probably were, not knowing whether at any moment we might not be hurried off to join our friends, was by no means a pleasant experience, but it was, after all, an excellent training, so far as I was concerned, for work which later on in the war was to come my way. Quite a considerable batch of mines were swept and destroyed in this particular area at that time.

The guns of the shore batteries also at times provided us with entertainment. They would fire bring-to rounds with the idea of stopping vessels endeavouring to enter port

without first having been examined and passed by our services. Some of their shells passed sufficiently close to us to give us a good notion of what it must feel like to be under fire.

One misty morning No. 3 was lying at her station, thinking of nothing in particular, when suddenly, "Plonk!" a shell fell in the water close alongside, and we heard the noise of the gun which had fired it inshore of where we were.

Immediately we sent a signal to the shore battery concerned, asking "Was that accidental, or intentional, please?" For a while we received no reply, and it was not until we had three times asked for an answer to our signal that the single word "Accidental" came through. It appeared, subsequently, that the shore battery, being about to engage in three-pounder sub-calibre practice, had been trying the shells in the guns, and by some means or other one had been accidentally discharged. The weather was thick, and from the battery the channel where we were lying could not be seen, but the people in the battery knew that that particular gun, at the moment when it was discharged, happened to be trained almost exactly on the spot where our vessel should be lying. From the tone of our signal they would naturally assume that their shell had not done us any material damage, but at the same time they must have been anxious to know where the projectile had fallen. They dared not inquire at the time; but that the matter interested them we knew the following day, for the reason that when we returned to port for coals we were met on arrival by an unofficial deputation from the battery, seeking confidential information as to where that shell had landed.

We explained, quite pleasantly, that if the incident were merely the result of an accident, we had no complaint to make, but that if that shell had been sent so close to us

intentionally, then the time had come when the location could not be regarded as entirely healthy, and we might be excused if we sought pastures new forthwith, hence our signal.

Very early one summer morning we were nearly sunk by a destroyer, and this is how it happened. We were keeping station in our usual place on the western side of the channel, and the water was as smooth as glass. Dawn had broken, and a slight early morning mist was hanging over the surface of the water. Conditions being as described, our watch on deck sighted, coming slowly out from port to resume her patrol, a thirty-knot destroyer of the old type.

Between us and the destroyer, lying resting on the surface of the water, was a porpoise, with his dorsal fin and part of his back clearly visible. Possibly the watchkeeper aboard the destroyer was only partly awake, owing to the early hour ; or, again, maybe the effect of the morning light was peculiar. Be that as it may, the destroyer's watchkeeper mistook that resting porpoise for an enemy submarine, and took prompt action to ram it. Whacking his boat up to full speed, he put his helm hard astarboard and made straight for the unsuspecting porpoise.

Incidentally, as the porpoise lay directly between the destroyer and ourselves, the destroyer's new course brought her so that she headed straight for the middle of our ship. Providence was good to us, and aroused that porpoise to an early appreciation of the destruction so rapidly bearing down upon him. He dived with promptitude, and then for the first time the destroyer realised, not only her mistake, but also that we lay directly in her track. Instantly she put her helm hard aport, and with the effect of her rudder heeling her over to a most alarming angle, she swept by us with a margin of a few feet to spare, and with her decks on her port side almost awash. When we saw her

pass clear, we started to laugh at the mistake she had made though we had to admit that prior to her discovering her error the situation did not seem one which called for mirth. Nothing which we could have done with our slow-moving vessel would have been of the least use in avoiding the crash which, in the early stages of the performance, appeared inevitable.

CHAPTER XV

BOAT WORK AND BOARDING

FROM the foregoing it will be gathered that life aboard the vessels of the service was not always dull, even so far as concerned the vessels themselves; but, from the point of view of individuals, it was the small-boat work which provided most variety. To tell of all the incidents within my own personal ken which were interesting in connection with boat work would fill a volume, so I will content myself with one or two examples which may be taken as fair samples of life in the small boats.

A word or two of explanation of our method of working may here be not out of place, as it should make the incidents which follow more generally understandable. The vessels of the service carried on davits, both to port and starboard, heavy double-ended boats of a length of about seventeen feet, and with a good beam. Some of these were propelled solely by means of oars, whereas others were fitted with small petrol-driven motors, capable of shoving them along in smooth water at a speed of about six knots.

Should the weather be fine and the water moderately smooth, and a vessel be seen approaching which it was desired to board, the lee motor-boat would be dropped from the duty vessel, and would proceed under her own power to meet and board the incoming vessel. She would run in on the lee side of the ship to be boarded, and tow alongside while the examination was in progress; afterwards sheering off and passing under the stern of the ship, she would motor



THE NORWEGIAN SHIP "ARTENSIS."

back to her parent vessel, and on arrival be hooked on and hoisted up. So much for fine, smooth weather; but it was not always fine and smooth.

In moderately bad weather the motor-boats were sometimes used, and sometimes those propelled by oars, but on whichever the choice fell, no attempt was made to go and meet the incoming ship. The duty vessel would range herself on the weather bow of the ship to be boarded, some little way ahead, and then drop her lee boat. At the appropriate moment the boat would sheer off from the side of her parent vessel and cross the bows of the oncoming ship. Arrived on the lee side of the ship to be boarded, she stood by to receive a boat-rope thrown down from the ship, and on this being safely caught and a turn taken with it round the forward thwart, the boat came under control of her rudder, and could be put alongside the Jacob's ladder as soon as a suitable opportunity presented itself. Having seen the boarding officer safely on to the ladder, the boat promptly sheered off again, and towed at the end of the boat-rope, well clear of the ship's side, until, the examination being finished, the boarding officer was ready to leave. Meanwhile, the duty vessel would not be idle. Having got rid of her boat, she would steam round and take station on the lee quarter of the ship under examination, so that when the boarding officer had rejoined his boat she could be swung off from the ship and cross the bows of the duty vessel. The duty vessel, steaming ahead, threw a boat-rope, secured and hoisted her boat with the least possible delay before altering her position relative to the wind.

Usually this boarding took place in what, for all practical purposes, amounted to the open sea, and occasionally the weather was so bad that it was impossible to use the oars of the rowing-boats, owing to their being blown out from between the thole pins. The motors also were useless, on

account of the volumes of spray which, dashing over the boat, soaked the motor and stopped it, or even prevented its being started. When these conditions obtained, it was customary to steam with the duty vessel under the lee of the craft to be boarded, and, while keeping good way on both ships, to drop the weather boarding boat complete with boat-rope. All being on board, the boat would be sheered out by means of her rudder to the extreme limit of her rope, and while in that position would receive another rope from the vessel to be boarded. Making this rope fast, and letting go that from her parent ship, she then sheered alongside the Jacob's ladder as opportunity offered itself. In returning to the duty vessel, much the same routine was observed, only the opposite way round. The duty vessel remained under the lee of the vessel being examined until she had retrieved, hoisted, and secured her small boat, both ships keeping good headway while the operation was being carried out.

Doubtless this performance sounds fairly simple, as described, but the greatest care was required if it was to be brought to a successful issue. It was necessary, in order to do it at all, that the two vessels must approach very close to each other, and while in this position, apart from the ever-present risk of collision, there was always a nasty sea between the two ships, caused by the meeting of the lee bow wave of the vessel being boarded and the weather bow wave of the duty vessel so close to leeward. These two cross waves got nicely mixed up with the ordinary sea already running, and the result was a horrid jumble of mixed cross chops, most trying for a small boat. It was a point of honour on the part of the boarding officer never to refuse to board, providing the Master of the duty vessel were willing to drop a boat. The Masters, on their part, hesitated to say that the weather was too bad to lower a boat if the boarding

officer were willing to go in her. The natural outcome of this was that the weather had to be bad indeed before boarding was regarded as impracticable.

Personally, provided that we had plenty of sea room, and that I had full confidence in the Master of my own vessel, I never saw the weather in which I was unwilling to go away on boat duty. Some stirring times came my way in consequence, but it was all useful experience.

Sometimes, while an examination was being carried out, the ship being examined would get out of position, and, either from carelessness or for some other reason, her lee side would become her weather one just as the boarding officer was ready to leave her. This would make things exceedingly lively, both for the boarding officer and for the crew of the boat towing alongside. We did our best under the circumstances, always remembering that, if humanly possible, we must not do anything to endanger the safety of the vessel being examined. Occasionally, the vessel being examined would get out of position while the boarding officer was actually stepping on to the Jacob's ladder in the act of boarding, and then the life of the boarding officer was not a happy one for the next few minutes.

One day, while a big sea was running, I had just stepped on to the Jacob's ladder on the lee side of a vessel of about four thousand tons, when there was a cry of "Look out, sir!" from the coxswain of my boat. Thinking that the warning meant that the boat was likely to swing in and crush me, I looked down, so as to be ready to jump from the ladder back into the boat before she could strike me. There were twenty rungs of the ladder between the point where I was and the deck above, far too many for me to be able to get up before the boat could reach me.

The moment occupied in looking down was my undoing. As I had stepped on to the ladder, so had the ship got out

of position, and, unobserved by me, she was now head to wind. The warning shout from the coxswain was to draw my attention to a huge wave which, rolling along the ship's side from forward, almost reached to the height of the deck. It was on and over me almost before I saw it. Clinging on to that ladder like a limpet, I was completely overwhelmed, and was washed aft along the ship's side to the extreme limit of the length of the ladder, for all the world as though I had been a mere chestnut hanging on the end of a string.

As I was washed aft the wave rolled me round and round. Now the ladder would be between the ship and myself, and again I would be between the ladder and the ship, until I was almost dizzy. Arrived at the full scope of the ladder, the wave passed and left me unsupported, high up within a few feet of the deck. With my own weight, back I swung, still being rolled round and round, but in the reverse direction, almost as far the other way, as though I were a pendulum. Reaching my forward limit, the next wave hit me and repeated the process. Backwards and forwards I swung, three times, before the ship was once again brought round so as to put me on the lee side. Then the crew untwisted the ladder from on deck, so that once more the ladder was between me and the side of the ship, and I made my way in safety to the rail and was helped on board, to carry out my examination as per programme.

What of my boat, while this performance was in progress? She had seen what was happening in sufficient time to take the necessary action, and sheering away to the full extent of her boat-rope, she had kept clear of me, and had ridden more or less successfully over the waves which had dealt so unkindly with my unfortunate self. This time my boat's crew enjoyed all the fun of the fair without

contributing in any way to the general entertainment, but things did not by any means always so turn out.

One day I had boarded a large steamer, in No. 3's boat, and on completing examination had rejoined the boarding motor-boat. In bringing the boat-rope aft, in order to help us to sheer off, the bowman allowed the slack end to trail overside. Our propeller was revolving at the time, and, as luck would have it, it caught the boat-rope, which was instantly drawn in and tightly wrapped round the propeller shaft. The steamer was rapidly gathering headway at the time, and as the strain came on the rope, quicker than thought itself our boat was swung round, end for end, and towed stern foremost!

Shouting to my two boat hands to get as far forward as they could, in order to keep our bow as deep in the water as possible, I seized the tiller and got the boat under control. Very gradually I edged her out from the ship's side, until the rope was as taut as an iron bar, leading broad off, and there was danger of our boat being capsized should she go any further. Then, calling the coxswain to me, I told him to lean overboard and grasp the rope. At the same moment I reversed my helm sharply, thus sheering in towards the ship. As we sheered in the rope slackened, and was grasped and brought on board by the coxswain. With a stroke of my knife, which I had drawn and opened with one hand while steering with the other, I severed the rope, though it was a brand-new three-inch Manila, and all danger had passed. We drifted astern, shortly to be collected and hoisted up by our parent ship, who had been an interested eye-witness of our adventure. Once in the davits, the cutting away of the remains of the rope from around the shaft presented no difficulty, and was soon accomplished.

Though some time is occupied in the telling, the whole thing happened very rapidly—so quickly, indeed, that the

steamer had no time to reduce her way in order to help us to get clear. Actually, I think her crew were so interested in watching our plight, to see whether or not we would be capsized, that it never occurred to them to try to cut the rope at their end; though, on the other hand, the fact that they took no action in this direction may have been due to a pardonable reluctance to part with at least thirty fathoms of new rope.

Another day I was detailed to board a large and deeply laden foreign steamer. The weather being moderate, I went away in No. 5's motor-boat, and having crossed the bows of the oncoming steamer, started to round-to under her lee, in order to drop alongside. Then, and not till then, did I discover that she was not losing headway as rapidly as I had anticipated would be the case, even though her engines were going full astern. We were only about half through our turn when I made the discovery—that is to say, we were heading directly for the ship at almost right angles to her course. To my horror, I then noted that, under the combined action of her reversed propeller and a strong wind which was blowing, she was coming down bodily on top of us, in such a way that I should not have room to complete my turn before her propeller would be abreast of us. At once I put our boat full speed astern, but this had only the effect of keeping us the same relative distance from the ship's side, while she steadily forged ahead.

Though her propeller was deeply immersed, such was the power of her engines that the propeller, in turning astern, created a huge vortex, or whirlpool, similar in character to the funnel-shaped whirl to be observed over the plughole of an emptying bath. Nearer and nearer to us approached that wicked-looking cavity which appeared to have a depth of at least ten feet, until the bow of our boat,

still going astern for all the engine was worth, overhung its extreme edge. I told the two members of my crew to get as far aft as possible, in the hope of deferring a nose dive into the vortex to the last possible moment. At the same time I did my best to attract the attention of those in charge of the steamer, so that they might stop her engines before it should be too late. Nothing was to be gained by jumping out of the boat, as no swimmer could possibly have swum more quickly away from the vortex than the boat was already travelling, under the influence of her reversed propeller.

Every second seemed to me to be ages long, but after what appeared a lapse of several hours, my frantic signals were observed from the bridge of the steamer. A clanging of bells, her propeller ceased to revolve, the vortex filled up, and we were saved! What a relief it was! I should have hated to have been responsible for the deaths of those two men who formed my crew that day. Though in my time I have encountered many brave men, I do not think that in the whole of my experience I have ever met two men who faced a particularly messy termination of their careers more calmly. Throughout the whole incident they never uttered one word of comment or complaint, but quietly and promptly carried out my instructions, exactly as though the situation was not in any sense unusual or differing from customary routine.

"Close call!" was my comment when the danger was over. "Aye, it was," said one; and the other spoke not a word, evidently being of opinion that his mate had dealt as fully with the matter as the incident merited.

CHAPTER XVI

GROUSING—DEFILED AND UNDEFILED—THE “THRESHER”
—A PLUCKY RESCUE

IT must not be assumed that our boat-hands never complained, because sometimes they had quite a lot to say. One stormy day as we were going alongside a Danish steamer, the Captain's wife had occasion to empty over the lee rail a bucket full of garbage. Not expecting that a boat would be alongside, she omitted to look before she dumped the stuff, and in the result my coxswain received the whole contents of the bucket all over him! Growl? I should just think he did! He seemed to think the lady had done it on purpose.

As he was in the act of picking some of the most offensive matter out of his hair, a big wave came round the stern of the steamer and, overtaking our boat, soaked the coxswain from head to foot, washed away the engine cover, stopped the engine, and half-filled the boat. Prior to this I had thought that Jack, our coxswain, must have completely exhausted his vocabulary on the subject of the Captain's wife, but it appeared that this was far from being the case, and that he still had a considerable reserve of opprobrious terms suitable for the expression of his feelings about that wave.

“Jack,” I said, “what a growler you are! First you complain because the lady accidentally tips smelly garbage over you, and then you complain because a kindly sea comes and washes you all nice and clean again, much more quickly

than you could possibly have done the job for yourself. Some people are never satisfied ! ”

For many days this incident was a joke against Jack, but he was a good-tempered chap, and never resented being teased. Though inclined to growl about things which did not really matter, he was cool and collected in times of stress, as the following tale will show.

One January morning a whole north-westerly gale was blowing, and No. 3 was on the second station, ready to carry out any instructions from the duty vessel which she might see fit to send us. For a time there was nothing much to be done, as, owing to the stormy weather, few ships were moving, but about ten o'clock the duty vessel called us up and told us to lead a Spanish steamer, in ballast, into the river, and there examine her. The duty vessel thought the weather too bad for boarding outside and we had no option but to obey orders. Personally, I should have been perfectly willing to board outside, but, to say the least of it, was not at all attracted by the prospect of having to do the job in the river. This would entail boarding the Spaniard while she was at anchor, and as the tide was then at the high-water slack, it was unlikely that she would be able to afford us any sort of a lee in which to carry out boating operations. Even in the river a very nasty sea was running, and the wind was blowing so hard that a cloud of flying spume was constantly sweeping the face of the water, the general unpleasantness being added to from time to time by driving storms of hail and sleet.

Arrived in the river, the Spaniard was duly anchored, and we dropped our starboard motor-boat. Before we could get away from the side of our ship, a wave broke into the boat, effectually damping the ardour of our engine, so that we could not induce it to restart. Owing to the restricted sea-room, even our own ship could not afford to give us any

shelter, and, towing alongside, the boat was rapidly filling. Under the circumstances, we passed her astern, and our parent vessel towed us in that position until we were directly to windward, and in line with the bows of the Spaniard.

Arrived there, our tow-rope was slipped, and, full of water—nearly level with the thwarts—we drove down wind, only just missing the outstretched cable of the Spaniard as we passed. Ready hands aboard the steamer threw ropes at us, and one of these we caught. Soon we were alongside. I boarded the vessel, and conducted the usual examination, leaving pools of water on the deck every time I moved my feet. The water was pouring out of my clothes in a continual stream.

The examination completed, I returned overside to the boat. As I had anticipated, the Spaniard was lying head to wind, thus allowing us no lee whatever, and, therefore, rejoining the boat was not exactly a simple operation. The boat, on the end of her rope, was bobbing up and down about six feet or more in a vertical direction, and at the same time surging backwards and forwards perhaps twice her own length in each direction. Some judgment is required if a boat is to be neatly boarded when behaving as she was, but I managed to do it more or less successfully.

Once I was safely aboard, the bowman started to come aft with the boat-rope, in order to cant the boat away from the side of the ship. He had little more than started on his way when a specially large wave caught the boat in its embrace, and, dashing her sternwards, tore the rope out of the man's hands. She had not even begun to cant when this happened, and the rope was now lost.

Down along the side of the Spaniard we drove before the waves, rubbing against the ship's plating as we went.

Glancing aft, I saw an unpleasant sight. As I mentioned previously, the Spanish vessel was in ballast. In this trim

fully half of the total diameter of her propeller was above the surface of the water. To my alarm I observed that the propeller was revolving, and, owing to the gale and the height of the ship's bridge above us, it was impossible to attract the attention of those in charge of the steamer to our extreme danger.

As we swept rapidly towards that revolving propeller our sensations were far from enviable. Pushing against the ship from the bow of our boat with an oar proved futile as a means of canting off, due to the rapidity with which we were driving astern before the waves. Somehow or other, our sternway must be checked, if our boat were not to come under the sweep of that propeller and be converted instantly into matchwood.

Jack looked at me, and I looked at him for a moment, both of us appreciating exactly what was in store for us, and neither being able to think of a suitable remark.

"Jack," said I at last, "it looks as though we were in for a wetting, unless we can manage to cant off very shortly. Let's try the effect of our shoulders against the ship's plating. We may be able to check her sufficiently."

Still we approached that whirling demon of destruction, until we were within our own length of the murderous blades. Jack never turned a hair, but leaned his whole weight against the ship, as did I.

"When we get within two feet of the tips of those blades we had better jump overboard as far as we can, and trust to the chance of being picked up, as the boat cannot then escape destruction," said I to Jack, who only nodded in reply.

Closer and closer we drew, and then at last the friction of our wet clothes against the rusty side of the Spaniard took effect, our bow canted off, a wave roared in between, and we passed clear, but only just. Less than three feet

separated the gunwale of our boat from the tips of the blades of that propeller, which was now revolving faster than ever.

While we were passing through these exciting moments the exact situation was fully appreciated by the horrified observers aboard No. 3. They shouted through megaphones to the Spaniard to stop his engines, and blew the ship's whistle to attract attention, but all entirely without effect.

After getting clear, we were helpless to do anything in the way of controlling our boat beyond keeping her head-on to the sea, and meanwhile were driven rapidly astern by the wind towards the shallow water forming the margin of the navigable channel. It became an interesting question whether or not the Master of our vessel would have pluck enough to attempt our rescue, and, alternatively, whether there was still time for him to reach us without putting his own vessel ashore.

Seeing our plight, he lost not one moment, but rang for full speed on his engines, and, ordering his helm hard astarboard, round in a complete circle she came. Could she manage the turn within the space at her disposal in that weight of wind? Had she been checked, even to the slightest extent, she certainly would have failed to come round, and have run straight ashore.

The Master kept her going all out without hesitation, and passed successfully between us and the shallow water, within a few feet of certain grounding! Ranging up close alongside our boat, a rope was thrown, which our bowman grabbed. Catching a turn with it round our forward thwart, he surged it, to ease the strain as the pull came on, and we gathered headway in her wake.

Our vessel, being now head to wind and therefore under better control, was able to slow down, so that we were not

completely swamped. Steaming slowly head-on to the waves, she towed us up to windward until she had sufficient sea room to make it possible for her to lie-to and to take us alongside. By this time our boat was practically water-logged, but the operation of hooking on and hoisting up was successfully performed in spite of this, by heaving her up bows first, so that most of the water ran out over the stern during the process, thus greatly reducing the total weight on the falls. Once safely on board again, I made my way to the bridge, to report the result of the examination of the Spaniard and to congratulate the Master of No. 3 on his excellent handling of his ship. To my surprise, I found those on the bridge as white as sheets, and with their knees trembling so that they could scarcely stand unless they held on to something. When I addressed them they were quite unable to utter a single word in reply; thus had the reaction, following on the sight of the imminent destruction of their friends by a specially untidy method, affected them perhaps ten minutes after the happening. While action was necessary, that action had been taken with the utmost promptitude and courage, but after the danger had passed it left them, for the time being, completely unnerved.

From my own personal experience in charge of ships, I have frequently found that this is what happens. During the critical moments, when prompt action is necessary in order to avert some dire calamity, one feels perfectly cool and collected. Such action as may seem to be best under the existing circumstances is taken with promptitude, but once the extreme danger is over, control of one's knees appears to cease. Speaking personally, my knees give out entirely, so that I must cling to something for support, or else flop down on the deck. For perhaps five minutes I feel utterly foolish, and merely dither if spoken to while in that condition. Subsequently the trouble passes off, and within a

quarter of an hour I am once again normal, and wondering how I could have been such a helpless babe.

Constantly I take myself to task, and explain to my own satisfaction that the danger is over and done with, and that it is childish to tremble and behave like a blithering idiot. That logical way of looking at it does not affect the situation in the least, and I continue to dither as per programme for a while, until sufficient time has passed for me to recover control automatically.

The human frame and its nerve centres are indeed funny things.

CHAPTER XVII

A CHANGE

RATHER more than three years spent under the War Office in the examination of inward-bound vessels proved so tiresome that a change seemed desirable. Accordingly, I transferred to the Royal Naval Air Service, towards the end of 1917, and was sent out to South Italy to act as Officer in Charge of Water Transport. In theory my work was supposed to be the loading and discharging of vessels carrying supplies for the Air Service. Actually, in addition to this work I had other duties added from time to time. For instance, I was a kind of First Lieutenant, having charge of the base camp and responsible for the routine and general conduct of the place. A fleet of steamboats and motor seaplane tenders was also entrusted to me, with their crews of English and Maltese ratings.

Besides these, for a while I had charge of the Mechanical Transport of the base, which comprised about fifty cars and lorries, many motor-cycles, and their personnel. Loading and discharging of railway trucks and dealing with the goods also came within my province.

At first I could by no means complain that life was dull. So much had to be learnt that I had not a moment to spare, but little occurred while I was there which can properly be said to belong to my experiences afloat.

There came a day when I wished one of the seaplane tenders to take a message to a place some miles away across Taranto harbour. I had then only recently taken over

charge of the section. Making a signal to the boat concerned to make ready for departure, I was surprised to receive an answering signal from her coxswain saying that he was unable to proceed, as one man was in the sick bay; this left only three men on board, in place of the usual four.

"Wash out my first signal," I said to my Chief Petty Officer, "and in place make a signal telling those three men to come ashore to their quarters."

As soon as my signal had been obeyed and the men were safely on the beach, I went down to the jetty, and, taking a boat, rowed myself off to the seaplane tender. Arrived alongside, I made my boat fast to the mooring, and boarding the tender, I started her engine. Casting off the mooring, I set out, and did the job for which it was supposed four men were required.

The job accomplished, I returned to moorings, stopped the engine, made all fast, and rowed myself ashore. On reaching the jetty, I instructed the Chief P.O. to send the three men back to their vessel. Throughout I made no comment of any kind, nor gave any reason for what I was doing. Subsequently I had to issue a definite order that that particular tender was not to leave her moorings unless at least two members of her crew were on board. She was too big and unwieldy to be safely handled by one man, and the necessity for the order lay in the fact that a strong tendency showed itself for individual members of her crew to try to emulate my performance.

Never again did a boat fail to get under weigh immediately when the signal ordering her to do so was once made.

A strong breeze was blowing one morning, and a message had to be sent out to a vessel lying some distance away. For this duty I detailed a steam pinnace, the crew of which consisted of five Maltese naval ratings. Perhaps half an

hour had passed since she had started on her journey when my Chief P.O. reported that her coxswain requested to be allowed to speak to me.

"Well, Carbona," I said, as the coxswain came up and saluted, "did you deliver that message?"

"The wind he blow ver' strong, water come aboard. Could not get to ship. 'Fraid steamboat sink. Came back to tell you," was the coxswain's reply to my question.

Looking out over the water, I weighed up the weather conditions, and came to the conclusion that though there was an appreciable sea running, it was quite possible for the pinnace to get out and deliver her message.

Turning to the coxswain, I said, "Suppose you go and have another try at it. Should you not succeed in delivering your message this time, come back and tie your boat up alongside the jetty, and bring your crew ashore. I shall not blame you in any way, but when you are all ashore I will take the pinnace out single-handed, and see whether or not I can deliver the message."

"Very good, sar," said Carbona. "I will try again."

Looking as though he was quite sure that I was sending him and his crew to almost certain death, he saluted, and went off to have that try.

After an hour had elapsed, back came Carbona to my look-out station, with a smile extending almost from ear to ear. Addressing me, he reported:

"I deliver dat message, sar, like you said."

"Good man! I felt sure you'd manage it, or I would not have asked you to try. You have proved that my good opinion of you and your crew was justified."

Never after those two incidents did I have the slightest trouble with any of the crews, either English or Maltese, no matter what I might ask them to do. Indeed, I had to be exceptionally careful in making suggestions, as, even had

my instructions been obviously foolish, the men would have attempted to carry them out.

From my earliest days I had always been told that Maltese were inclined to be cowards at sea, but from my own observation I should say that they are, as a race, highly nervous when afloat, but, if tactfully handled, their personal pride is always sufficient to master their fears. This is really one of the most genuine forms of bravery.

I was very fond of my Maltese ratings, and always trusted them implicitly. Never once did they let me down, or show any inclination to do so. For some reason or other, I think that my liking for them was reciprocated. When I eventually had to leave them, on being returned to England in June 1918 unfit for further service, from where they were gathered together on shore in the Maltese quarters those men saw me embarking in the pinnace. Down the side of the hill they raced, to reach the jetty before the pinnace cast off, each man determined to say good-bye in person, and to shake me by the hand. Discipline went by the board—it was enough for them that they were losing their friend, nothing else mattered just then.

The senior Maltese P.O. came on board the pinnace, and, by virtue of his seniority, promptly deposed the boat's own coxswain, and announced that he would act as coxswain himself. When we finally got away from the jetty, at least two complete Maltese crews were on board the pinnace. Under the circumstances this fact was winked at, and when we arrived alongside the railway pier, there were more Maltese anxious to carry my baggage to the train than there were packages to be dealt with. They squabbled amongst themselves, but a compromise was at length reached by two men carrying one bag between them.

My emotion on leaving my friends the Maltese, and on witnessing their demonstration of affection, was such that

I was almost incapable of speech, and I had to content myself with wringing the proffered hands, practically in silence. Always I shall have a soft spot in my heart for Maltese. In some respects my chaps were a good deal like children, and I found it well to treat them as such. I was gentle in my handling of them, never severe, but always absolutely firm and definite, so that no misunderstanding of my wishes was possible.

They used to amuse me intensely at times. A senior P.O. would come along to me with a small request, to which I would give my sanction—it was my practice to give the Maltese as much latitude as possible. That request having been successful, next day some further concession would be asked for, and granted. From day to day this kind of thing would continue, until at length matters had reached a point beyond which I was not prepared to go.

“Sorry, Ricardo. You have reached the absolute frozen limit in the way of requests. You must be satisfied with what you have already got,” I would say, when Ricardo mentioned what was wanted.

“A’right, sar. Very good,” he would remark, going away with a grin all over his face, evidently fully satisfied that my decision was final, and that he had got all that he could have reasonably expected to achieve. Never was there a sign of dissatisfaction if I found myself unable to grant one of their requests.

My time being very fully occupied with various duties, I found the question of getting my hair cut rather a problem. Other officers, with more time on their hands, used to make their way to the nearest native barber’s shop, about a couple of miles from camp, and allow the Italian barber to operate on them.

I did not think this a handy arrangement, and noticing that all the ratings under my charge always had their hair

nicely trimmed, I one day asked one of them who cut his hair for him.

"The Maltese cut each other's hair and that of the English ratings as well," he replied.

"Do you think that they would be willing to include me in their ministrations?" I inquired.

"Yes, sir, I think so, if you would not object. But I will inquire in the Maltese quarters, and let you know what they say."

Apparently, though such a suggestion was highly unusual, one of the Maltese stokers was willing to perform, provided I was quite sure I did not mind. Of course I did not mind, and that afternoon the stoker duly appeared at the door of my cabin, ready to carry out the operation. Had the poor chap been about to submit himself to having six teeth drawn by a dentist, he could not have been more perturbed.

I thanked him for helping me out of a serious difficulty, and did my very best to put him at his ease, with, I am afraid, only partial success.

Seating me in a chair, and covering my shoulders with a towel in the approved fashion, he started to clip. Absolute silence reigned, except for the click of the scissors; I could not even hear him breathing. Soon I was to have the explanation. With a bursting sound, almost like an explosion, a blast of air suddenly struck me in the back of the neck. My barber, in fear lest he might breathe upon me, since the beginning of the hair-cutting operation had manfully held his breath, until nature could no longer be denied, with the result described!

On my telling him not to worry, even if he did breathe upon me from time to time, he regained his confidence, and before the work was finished he was breathing quite normally and his hands had ceased to tremble. When he finished the

job I dug out a mirror, and with it regarded his handiwork. Loud in my praises, I thanked him for cutting my hair so nicely, and gave him a little something for himself. Thus was the hair-cutting problem solved for the remainder of my stay in Italy.

One afternoon when I was standing some distance from my cabin, I observed signs of disturbance in the Maltese quarters. Men in ones and twos were popping out of the hutments, and disappearing helter-skelter over the edge of the plain on which both my cabin and the Maltese quarters stood. The day was hot, and nothing was to be gained by going over to investigate the cause of the excitement, so I remained where I was waiting for the explanation to come to me.

I had not long to wait. Soon from over that edge where the Maltese had disappeared appeared a quaint procession. First came two fat Maltese stokers, with perspiration streaming down their faces, proudly leading between them a slim but very dejected-looking Italian naval rating, each of whose arms was firmly being held behind his back by one of the stokers. The rear of the procession was made up of about fifty per cent. of my total Maltese establishment, including the cook, all clacking away in Maltese as though their lives depended on it.

When the procession reached me I begged for silence, and asked that one Maltese should act as spokesman and tell me what the trouble was about. This rôle was, by general consent, allotted to the cook, also an immensely fat Maltese, but capable of speaking a good imitation of the English language, if not over-excited.

"Sar! I see 'eem," pointing at the dejected Italian sailor, "coming out of your house. I think 'e what you call pinch what is yours. These we cannot 'ave. I cry out to all 'ands, we must catch. I run, but am too fat.

The others run quicker, they 'ave 'eem. 'E 'as your tings. Look !”

I looked as requested, and saw that the Italian had got a fountain pen of mine, besides a number of other small articles belonging to me, the details of which I don't now remember. These he had evidently purloined from my cabin. Unfortunately for him, but fortunately for me, he had been seen to come out from my cabin by the Maltese cook, with the result so graphically described by that gentleman himself.

Had you told me before that my two fat stokers could possibly have overtaken and captured that fleet-footed Italian, I should have frankly disbelieved you, but there was the evidence before my eyes. In between gasping for breath, those two stokers and the cook visibly swelled with the pride of their achievement, and I thanked them most heartily for what they had done. Their efforts and promptitude had undoubtedly saved me from suffering serious loss, and I was grateful.

The Maltese hoped that, having retrieved the stolen articles, I would allow them to take some change out of the hide of the Italian for daring to steal my property, but this I could not permit. Quietly explaining that the man must be dealt with by his own officers, I had him handed over intact to a guard of his own people, whom I sent for. This was obviously most disappointing to the Maltese, but, like the good sportsmen they were, they made the best of it.

CHAPTER XVIII

SAVING THE LIGHTER—TEMPORARY SKIPPER—A NARROW SQUEAK

BESIDES our own little fleet, which belonged to the Naval Air Service, we had on loan from the Navy a steam drifter, complete with crew, which, though she did not belong to us, was under my orders. Much of my time was spent on board her, as she was our principal means of transporting working parties, and we also used her as a tug for moving our lighters about between ship and shore.

One day one of our lighters was lying tied up alongside a concrete jetty, when a gale of wind suddenly sprang up which made that particular jetty a dead lee shore, and completely without protection, in spite of the fact that it was situated within the limits of a small bay. Going on board the drifter, I said to her Skipper:

"You know that lighter lying alongside the concrete jetty? We shall have to go and bring her out of it. A few hours of this weather, and she will smash herself to pieces if left, besides probably doing damage to the jetty."

"With due respect, sir," said the Skipper, "I would not dare to try going in there with this packet in a gale such as is now blowing. We should never be able to get out again—certainly not if we had the lighter lashed alongside. But I have a suggestion to make; if you care to take charge of the drifter and take her in yourself, I will put myself under your orders and do what you tell me."

"But, Skipper," I objected, "you very well know that

your bally drifter does not belong to us, and that I have no right to even touch her wheel."

"I know all that perfectly well, sir," he replied, "but I am quite willing to take the risk, and should we get into lumber neither I nor any of my crew will breathe a word about your having handled her."

It was imperative that the lighter be rescued without delay, and as no alternative presented itself, I agreed to the Skipper's proposal. Boldly I took charge, and started off for the bay, but as I entered the bay itself and realised that, once in it, there was no room to turn, but that I should have to come out stern first, I was not by any means sure that I had not made a fool of myself. However, I was in for it now. It was impossible to turn back, and the gale was howling with unabated fury. If the operation were to be successful, everything must be quickly done, and there must be no hitch of any kind.

Passing the word to the engine-room staff to close skylights and doors, I placed the drifter's nose between the lighter and the jetty. The Skipper and some of the crew jumped ashore and released the mooring-ropes, while I steamed ahead. This brought the lighter on to my starboard side, where I had to have her owing to the drifter having a right-handed propeller. With the lighter on the port side, the drifter would have refused to steer when going astern, and, indeed, would have turned round and round.

Before the lighter had discovered that her mooring-ropes had been cast off, she was securely lashed alongside the drifter, whose engines were by then going full speed astern. Would she steer, or not?

After a moment of hesitation, during which she started to cant, she straightened up and gathered sternway right into the wind's eye; this I had hoped would be the case,

and trusted that I had made no mistake in calculating on it. Now it remained to be seen whether she would prove to have power enough to drag both herself and the lighter away from the beach, which was getting dangerously close.

With her propeller thrashing round in a smother of foam as her stern lifted over the waves, she more than held her own. As she gathered way, the seas began to break on board over the taffrail, but all openings had been closed in anticipation of just this happening, so all was well. She passed out clear of the bay, with spray flying clean over her wheelhouse and over the top of her funnel, but she had saved the lighter and no damage had been done.

After this incident, on many occasions I handled the old boat. Frequently only myself, the Cook, and the Second Engineer would be left on board, all the rest of the crew, including the Skipper, being scattered about all over the harbour on various lighters, engaged in mooring and unmooring them, in order that our work might be carried out as expeditiously as possible. This was a very great saving of time, and no damage ever resulted.

When I went on board one afternoon, to accompany the drifter on a rather special piece of work, I was met by the Mate with a message from the Skipper.

"Could you take charge this afternoon, sir?" said he. "The Skipper has been took very bad, and is lying in his bunk."

I went to see the Skipper, and finding him evidently suffering from a bad attack of malaria, I told him to set his mind at rest; I would look after his ship.

If the matter had rested with me, I would have preferred to land him and send him to the sick bay then and there, but the work on which we were engaged brooked no delay. Perforce, therefore, I kept him on board until the evening. Immediately on our return I landed the Skipper,

and saw no more of him for several weeks. Indeed, I only once saw him again, and that was as he was departing for England on sick leave.

Reporting the matter at Headquarters, I requested that a signal be made to the parent ship of the drifters, asking that a relief Skipper be sent ; and this was duly carried out, but no Skipper arrived.

What was to be done ? Was I to carry on as Skipper until relieved ? I was.

For many days I added skippering that drifter to my other duties, until at long last she needed coals. Though willing enough to take charge in the ordinary way, I could not see that it was any job of mine to waste a whole day coaling ship, and there seemed to be no prospect of a relief Skipper being sent to take over. This being so, on the following morning I took her down to where her parent ship was lying, and having tied her up alongside, went on board to report.

I complained bitterly that no Skipper had been sent, explained that the boat needed coals, mentioned that she was lashed alongside, and departed in one of my own launches, which had been detailed to come and collect me, before those on the parent ship had sufficiently recovered from their astonishment to be capable of asking any questions. That evening the drifter reported for duty, fully coaled, and complete with new Skipper. Apparently the parent ship had at last awakened from slumber, and appreciated that a Skipper was really needed.

Though we only had one drifter regularly attached to us, in times of unusual stress other drifters were detailed to assist. Sometimes exceptionally large quantities of bombs had to be moved from place to place in a hurry, and it was on occasions such as these that the extra drifters would lend a hand. I remember one Sunday morning particularly in this connection.

Large quantities of bombs were urgently required by our seaplanes at Malta, and a vessel would be leaving for that place early in the afternoon. In the time at our disposal we could not manage to handle sufficient bombs with only our own drifter, and therefore two extra boats came alongside bright and early. When all three were loaded, off they went to where the Malta boat was lying, and, secured all round her, discharging was started on board all three at once.

For a time everything went well, but, owing to the short time intervening before the Malta boat was due to depart, everything possible had to be done to expedite the work.

While I was standing on the upper deck of the vessel, directing the loading of bombs from one of the drifters into the forehold, I received a considerable shock. We were loading 320 lb. bombs, each packed in a separate case, two cases at a time in each sling. These bombs were pear-shaped affairs, and had by far the greater part of their weight in one end. It was, therefore, advisable to sling the cases not in the middle, but rather nearer to the heavy end, so that they might hang squarely when raised by the winch.

By some means or other the working party on the drifter placed two of the cases in a sling with their heavy ends opposite ways, and this was not observed by anyone. To my horror, as those two cases made their appearance level with the upper deck on which I was standing, some twenty feet above the drifter, I saw that they were slipping out of the sling!

Signalling to the man at the winch to stop hoisting, I sang out to those in the drifter, "Stand from under, below!" and as the bombs, dropping out of the sling, disappeared from view, I waited, with my heart in my mouth, for the terrific explosion which I felt must follow, and which

would, when it came, blow us to Kingdom Come and destroy every living thing for miles around.

For an age I seemed to wait, but the actual time cannot have been very long, for I stepped to the rail and looked down sufficiently soon to see those bomb cases land on the drifter's deck.

Each of the cases landed endways, on one of its corners, and, falling to pieces like a house of cards, gently slid its bomb on to the deck! One fell forward, and the other fell aft, so that they did not knock against each other. Nothing further happened, or this incident would not have been related by me. The slinging party had heard my shout, and had stood clear, so nobody was hurt. After this, work went on as before, but no further mistakes were made, and we managed to get the last bombs loaded as the Malta boat was under way and actually steaming down the harbour seaward bound.

CHAPTER XIX

GOOD-BYE TO ITALY—PUKKA NAVY

WHEN I was discharged from Italy I hastened home to England, and reached London ahead of the papers dealing with my case. Not delaying a moment, I applied to the Admiralty for an appointment to a minesweeper. Fortunately no difficult questions were asked, and I was lucky enough to be appointed right away to a new twin screw sloop named *Penarth*. She was the senior ship of the flotilla, and was in charge of an R.N. Commander; her First Lieutenant was also R.N. I was her Number Two, and the only amateur in her complement—indeed, to the best of my knowledge, mine was the only amateur appointment in the flotilla. Our Number Three, though a one-striper, was also a deep-water man, and was inclined to resent the importation of an amateur as Number Two and his senior.

On joining *Penarth*, I was told that the Captain wished to see me. Going along forward to his quarters and knocking on the door, a pleasant voice told me to come in. On entering I saw, sitting in a chair in front of a table, busy writing, a typical naval commander, perhaps two or three years older than myself.

“Come aboard, sir,” I reported.

“You are my new Second, I suppose,” said he, looking me over with an appraising eye. “Where have you been all this long time?” he continued. “I have been expecting you for the past week.”

"I only got my orders to join the day before yesterday, and came straight away, only to find, on my arrival last night, that you were at sea," I replied.

"Know anything about ships?" was his next question.

"A little. Purely as an amateur, though," said I, anxious from the start to create the correct atmosphere.

"Umph! Know the rule of the road, and that sort of thing?" he went on, still looking me up and down.

"Used to do so, sir, some years ago, though I have since forgotten the exact wording."

"Any certificates?" he next fired at me.

"Only as an amateur master, eleven years ago," said I.

"Umph!" he grunted. "Been flying, haven't you? Anyway, come along and be introduced to Number One," he concluded, leading the way aft to the wardroom flat, where he introduced me to the First Lieutenant, and there left me.

Number One was a pleasant-faced, jolly-looking young man, bearing two straight gold bands and a curl upon his sleeve, denoting his rank as Lieutenant R.N. He was evidently several years my junior in age, though my senior officer aboard the ship.

After a short chat on things in general, he turned to business.

"You will have the middle watch," said he.

"I know that I shall," I remarked.

"How could you possibly know that, when you have only just joined?" he exclaimed, obviously astonished.

"My dear chap," I explained, "the last-joined mug always gets the middle watch, so I knew that happiness would be mine."

"Have you any objection?" he inquired, thinking perhaps that I was not so green as he had anticipated, and that therefore it might be as well to make a show of consulting me.

"Not the least in the world," I assured him, and at once

suggested that I was perfectly willing to take Duty Officer that evening, should he and Number Three care to take a run ashore. By this means I made a good impression, which afterwards stood me in good stead in many ways.

During that evening I made friends with the Engineer Officer of the ship, and from him obtained much useful information about the vessel herself, about my shipmates, and about our Captain.

Penarth was a practically new ship, and was commissioned less than a fortnight prior to my joining her. Usually with new vessels some little time elapses after commissioning before things become properly shaken into place, and before the ship's company feel really at home. This was the condition aboard *Penarth* when I joined her—her people were just beginning to know her little peculiarities, but had not yet fully settled down.

Next day we left dock in the morning, and spent a good deal of time swinging ship and adjusting compasses, after which we made fast to a buoy to wait until our time for departure arrived. Astern of us, also secured to buoys, lay the remainder of our flotilla, seven in number, all very similar ships, fully coaled and provisioned, with their crews on board watching for us to make the signal for them to slip and proceed. Being the last-joined officer, I had but little to do during this period of waiting, so I occupied my time in studying the appearance of these other vessels and noting any little differences between them, so that I might, if necessary, identify one from another. Though they were all more or less built to the same specification, they were the products of different building yards, and therefore were not identical in every way. Even in the tone of their paintwork they differed slightly—all were grey, but of varying shades. Some of their funnels were darker than others, and there were certain differences in some of the details of their deck fittings and in the way their masts were stayed.

Soon after sunset we received permission to proceed, and accordingly made the signal for the flotilla to cast off from the buoys and to follow us seaward, steaming single line ahead. Though the whole business was intensely interesting to me, as I had never before served in a genuine Navy ship, knowing that I was to take the middle watch, I tore myself away from the spectacle and, going below, turned in.

Turning out again in good time, I made my way to the forebridge, and from thence to "Monkey's Island," as the small upper bridge on top of the wheelhouse where the officer of the watch is stationed is usually termed. Arriving on Monkey's Island just on the stroke of eight bells, I reported for duty. Up there I found the Third, who had the first watch, and also the Captain. It was an intensely dark night, but clear, and it took me an appreciable time before I could distinguish anything beyond the faint light from the standard compass.

"That you, Number Two?" said the voice of the Skipper. "You're middle watch, I suppose, as you are last joined."

"Yes, that is about the size of it," I replied.

"Well, we are heading south twenty east, by standard compass, at ten knots, single line ahead, a cable and a half apart, without lights. Keep a sharp look-out, don't lose any of your tail, call me if you sight anything of interest, and call me in any case at a quarter to four. Are you all right?"

On my replying that I was, he said good-night, and disappeared down the ladder. The Third handed me the private signals for the day, and having repeated the steaming orders, also wished me good-night, and went below.

Thus left to my own devices in the middle of a dark night, steaming at ten knots across the North Sea on the Monkey's Island of the leader of eight ships, plugging away without lights, and knowing little or nothing of the routine of Navy vessels, my feelings were queer. It seemed such



DANISH BARQUE HOVE-TO.



6TH WING, R.N.A.S. MOTOR-BOAT SECTION.

a change, after my recent life in the Air Service. I could not help admiring the courage of our Skipper, who had sufficient confidence in his own ability to size up a man's capabilities that he could leave an amateur alone under such circumstances on the very first occasion that he had taken over the watch. The fact that he had that courage made me absolutely determined that his pluck should be justified if it lay in my power to do it.

Only once during that watch did I send any message to the Skipper, which was to the effect that we were approaching a fleet of trawlers, but that they would pass all clear to starboard. Even that message would not have been sent had I not feared that the Skipper might be annoyed should he find out afterwards that I had failed to report the sighting of the trawlers.

About three-thirty the Skipper visited me, and inquired how I had been getting along.

"Quite nicely, sir, thank you," said I; and he remained up there, chatting about one thing and another, until I was relieved by Number One, who was taking the morning watch, at eight bells. Once relieved, I did not hang around, but dived below to get what sleep I could before breakfast time.

Turning out again about seven-thirty in the morning, and just ready to go and seek breakfast in the wardroom, suddenly I heard the frantic clanging of alarm bells, which denoted "Action stations."

Having so recently joined, and being without any knowledge of gunnery, or of anything else in connection with the fighting equipment of our ship, no particular station had as yet been allotted to me. In spite of this, for the moment I forgot about breakfast, and ran up on deck to see what was going on.

It was a beautiful bright sunny morning, with an almost smooth sea. Around us, in pairs, steamed the other

vessels of our flotilla, in sweeping formation. Approaching us at speed from the southward was to be seen a flight of seaplanes, which even now were attempting to drop bombs on our sister ships.

Taking up my stand on deck as an interested spectator, well out of the way of our own people working at the guns, I watched the performance. Round us, over us, backwards and forwards, swept and circled the Hun seaplanes, whenever they saw a suitable opportunity releasing one or more bombs at our devoted ships, while our anti-aircraft guns barked and spat viciously each time a Hun came within range. Some of those bombs dropped very near to us; in fact, on one or more occasions the bombs dropping into the water alongside threw up spray which wet the decks of the vessel for which the bomb itself was intended. Soon the Huns drew off, evidently having discharged the whole of their bombs. All our vessels escaped without being actually touched, and, to our lasting regret, those rascally seaplanes were equally lucky; not one of our shells found its mark. Still, this was quite a useful introduction for me to the life aboard a minesweeper working off the Dutch coast.

"If things go on as they have started," thought I to myself, "life is not likely to be dull aboard these hookers."

After we had been at sea for our usual period, we were forced to return to port for coal, and it so happened that it was my watch on deck while we were going up the river to our base at Grimsby. Arrived off the dock, my duties finished; so well had I told the tale about being an amateur, that I was not expected to do anything while entering dock. Number One took charge forward, and the Third looked after the quarterdeck, while Captain and Navigating Lieutenant had the bridge to themselves.

For over a fortnight this arrangement held good, but one day our Skipper wished to know something more about it.

"Have you never been into dock with a ship before you joined this vessel?" he inquired, addressing me.

"Never with a Navy ship, sir."

"What earthly difference does that make, whether she is a Navy ship or not?"

"The difference, as I see it," said I, "is that with a Navy ship there are so many men sculling round that some of them are pretty certain to get hurt, and, anyway, I would not know what to do with such a crowd. In a vessel of this size, two men and a boy would be enough for the job."

"Oh!" said he, regarding me as though he were about to bite. "In that case, you will take charge aft whenever we dock or undock in the future."

"Very good, sir," was the only comment I made, as I realised that the "amateur" tale was finished, so far as docking ship was concerned; and, after all, I had got out of the job for a fortnight!

It is perhaps as well to explain here that as an amateur I never could see the Navy quite from the Service point of view. Once, when discussing a certain action which I proposed to take, Number One said:

"But you can't do that!"

"Can't I?" I replied. "Watch me!"

"No. You would incur the displeasure of the Lords of the Admiralty."

"— the Lords of the Admiralty."

"But you would be dismissed the Service," he objected.

"Well, that would suit me. I am not here for the good of my health"; which terminated the discussion, I being regarded as quite outside the pale.

It was customary in our ship, when entering this particular port, for the officer of the watch to notify the Navigator as we were about to pass the outer light-vessel. The Navigator would then come up on to the bridge and take charge until the ship was safely in dock. Usually, the

officer of the watch would be relieved by the Navigator, and would then be free to go below, or do as he liked, though not always.

When we entered Grimsby for the second time it again happened to be my watch on deck as we passed the outer light-vessel, and I duly notified the Navigator. Almost immediately, instead of the Navigator, the Captain came up.

"Have you told the Navigator that you are passing the outer ship?" he asked.

"Yes, sir," I replied.

"Can you take the ship in?" was his next remark.

When I replied, "Yes, sir," to that also, he seemed rather surprised.

"Been in here before?" he inquired.

"Yes. With you last trip."

"Was that the only time?"

"Yes, sir," I said again.

He then asked, "How can you know what courses to steer, if you have only been in once before?"

"I made a note of them last trip; but, anyway, I can remember them, without referring to my notes."

He did not seem altogether to believe me, but grunted, "Carry on. Take her in."

Nothing loth, I carried on, and each time before a change of course became necessary he would ask me what I was going to steer, and I would tell him, each time correctly, though I always allowed rather more distance from known dangers than he had done when he brought her in. When we had duly arrived off the dock he made no comment whatever, but I knew that I had done nothing to spoil his good opinion of me by bringing the ship in. This pleased me immensely, as I had the very highest opinion of him, and would have done anything to secure his approval.

CHAPTER XX

NAVIGATOR'S NERVES—THE SKIPPER'S SOLILOQUY—MINE-SWEEPING

SOMETIMES the strain of their work would prove too much for our Navigators, and they would have to be landed to undergo rest cures. On these occasions, rather than wait for a new Navigator to join, our Skipper would take the flotilla to sea and do all the navigating himself. This I greatly admired, as the Navigator's job was no sinecure.

Once, returning to port, when the Captain was without a Navigator, I was with him on the bridge, and observed one of the flotilla out of position as we were approaching our anchorage. The Skipper also saw her, and turning to me, inquired :

"What is *Sligo* going to do, getting out of position like that ?"

"Going to sink that steam trawler, from all appearances."

"Nonsense!" he snapped. "What do you mean?"

"Just that, and no more, sir," I remarked quite casually, as *Sligo* crashed stem on into the stokehold of the trawler.

"Why doesn't he stop his engines, instead of plugging ahead as he is doing?" said the Skipper, impatiently.

"Probably he wants to give her crew a chance to get out of her before she sinks, and is therefore keeping his nose in the hole in order to ease the inrush of water," I answered.

"You're right. Why did I not think of that myself?" he exclaimed.

Just then, all the trawler's crew having succeeded in safely boarding *Sligo*, she rang full astern on her engines. For a moment the trawler floated clear, her decks just flush with the water, then down she went stern foremost, leaving only some wooden wreckage of hatches, fish-boxes, oars, and odd pieces of timber floating to show whence she had gone.

"That is the first time that I have ever seen a vessel sink," remarked my Skipper.

Personally, I was not greatly impressed, as the sight was no new one to me, and I said as much.

"Thought you said you were an amateur."

"So I am, sir."

"And yet," said the Captain, ruminatively, and without apparently referring to anything in particular, "I have been almost constantly at sea in ships of His Majesty's Navy since I left the *Britannia*, about twenty years ago."

About four weeks after I joined *Penarth* the Skipper said to me one day, "To-morrow you will take duty as Number One of this ship. I am sending our First Lieutenant away to take temporary charge of one of the other vessels of the flotilla, as her Captain is going on sick leave."

"Very nice for me, sir," said I, obviously indicating by my tone that the suggestion did not please me.

"What do you mean by 'Very nice for you'?" demanded my Skipper.

"All kicks and no ha'pence," I replied. "Your present Number One is pukka Navy, and I have seen how you chase him round, and how he seems to be almost always more or less in the soup. What sort of a chance shall I, a green amateur, knowing nothing of Navy ways, have as First Lieutenant to a full-blown Navy Commander?"

"You need not worry about that. If I choose to put up with you in that capacity, it is my affair alone, and has nothing to do with you."

"Very well, sir," I said. "But Number One in this ship is Gunnery Officer, and I know nothing about guns, and have never been through a gunnery course in my life."

"That need not trouble you," remarked the Skipper. "I will take fire control at 'Action Stations' from the forebridge, and you will take charge of the four-inch forward."

Needless to say, I was rather bothered at the prospect of having to undertake so many new duties about which I knew absolutely nothing, but I wished, if possible, to give satisfaction to my Captain, for whom I had so great an admiration and so strong a personal regard.

Many of the ship's company were Fleet Reserve men, and as such must know all about the routine of Navy ships. Thinking the matter over, I came to the conclusion that my best course would be to enlist their help, as they could show me the ropes if I were able to secure their sympathy so that they would be willing to do so.

Gunnery seemed to be the most urgent matter on which I needed help, for the reason that "Action Stations" might be sounded at any moment, so it behoved me to make preparations without delay. Accordingly, I sent for the seaman gunlayer of the forward four-inch gun, and when he arrived I proceeded to take him into my confidence.

"I suppose you know all the drill for your gun? Personally, I know nothing whatever about guns, or the drill in connection with them, but it appears that I am the officer in charge of your four-inch. When 'Action Stations' is sounded, and the crew assembles at the gun, I shall stand near you, and shall be greatly obliged if you will quietly tell me what to do, and what orders to give. Though knowing nothing of gunnery, I am capable of giving orders so that they can be heard, providing that I know what

orders to give. If you, speaking in your ordinary voice, go over the necessary order, I will do the shouting, repeating exactly those words which you have used. By this means I expect that we shall get on famously, and nobody will be a pin the wiser. Should you wish to do so, I have not the slightest objection to your explaining the position in confidence to the members of your gun's crew."

Throughout my remarks the gunlayer regarded me with an ever-growing expression of amazement on his face. He had evidently never before met a similar situation, but, as I concluded what I had to say, a broad grin took the place of the amazed expression on his countenance. Explaining that he fully understood what I wanted, and that he would certainly do his level best to assist me in every possible way, he saluted and hurried off, doubtless to impart the astonishing news to his mates.

It was perhaps just as well that I should have had my interview with the gunlayer so promptly, for early on the following morning "Action Stations" was sounded. We were passage making at the time, and the day was fine; therefore our Captain evidently thought it a suitable opportunity for exercising the crew at the guns.

I need not relate in detail what happened, as it is sufficient to say that everything went off as I had hoped it would. Only once did I give an order entirely on my own account, and that was when, after the order "Ten green" had been given from the fire control and I observed the muzzle of the gun to be swinging to port, quite quietly I said, "Green, not red. Turn the spout the other way;" this to the huge delight of the gun's crew.

When the exercises were finished, on the suggestion of my friend the gunlayer, I went to report to the Captain that the guns had been secured, and to return the keys of the magazines, which were kept in the Captain's cabin.

The Skipper remarked, "I thought, Number One, that you said you knew nothing of gunnery?"

"No more I do, sir," I replied.

"You seemed to get along all right with your gun at 'Action Stations' this morning, in spite of your lack of knowledge," said he, wrinkling his nose at me while he spoke—a quaint little trick which he had, and which usually denoted that something had pleased him.

"Provided you were satisfied, that is all that matters, sir," said I.

To this day, I do not believe my Skipper has any idea how the gunnery difficulty was got over. He probably still thinks that I had pretended to be a greater fool than was actually the case.

Normally we carried three watch-keepers, but while I was acting First Lieutenant we only had two. This meant that Number Three and I were supposed to be on watch and watch while at sea, four hours on and four hours off, turn and turn about. While in theory this arrangement may not appear to be very arduous, I found in practice that I got very little sleep, because in the Captain's Standing Orders it was definitely laid down that the First Lieutenant must personally attend to weighing or letting go the anchor, and must always be present when either passing or heaving-in the sweep was in progress. True, we were seldom sweeping during the hours of darkness, but we sometimes went to an anchor at night. On these occasions we would frequently come-to between ten and eleven in the first watch. After letting go the anchor, setting the watch, and completing my last round of the ship, it was usually nearly midnight before my duties were finished. As we never anchored near the ground which we were to sweep, it was usual to heave short about two forty-five in the morning, and weigh anchor at three, so as to reach the

minefields by daylight, when sweep would be passed between five and six o'clock. My only chance to get a sleep was therefore during the first part of the middle watch—say from about midnight to two thirty-five or so. Under these circumstances, I made the Third keep the middle watch, so that if we happened to be under weigh all night, as we often were, I might, if I was lucky, get the whole of the middle watch in my bunk.

Partly to save the precious hours of sleep, and partly in order to be able to turn out instantly if required, I always turned in, while at sea, in my clothes, seldom even taking the trouble to remove my boots.

This kind of thing had been going on for some weeks, when one day the Third came grousing to me that he did not think it fair that he should always have to keep the middle watch. I pointed out to him that, owing to the Standing Orders, the middle watch was the only time when I could get a chance of a sleep.

"If, however," said I, "you care to tackle the Old Man, and get him to allow you to pass sweep in my place, I shall not have the slightest objection to keeping the middle watch."

"Right," said he, quite perky. "I'll see the Old Man about it."

On the request that Number Three be allowed to pass sweep in my place, so that I might keep the middle watch, being put to the Skipper, his reply came as something of a surprise to our young friend.

"Yes," answered the Skipper. "Number One has been having a very hard time of it lately. Some extra sleep would do him no harm, and you can easily do a bit more work without straining yourself. Tell him that I have no objection to your taking in or passing sweep instead of him."

This was not in the least what the Third had expected. Indeed, he was so annoyed about it that he came to me and repeated his interview with the Skipper verbatim. Subsequently, I had a much easier time of it, seldom getting less than four hours sleep out of twenty-four when at sea.

One cold morning I had a specially pleasant surprise. Soon after I had taken charge on Monkey's Island the Navigator joined me.

"Number One," said he, "the Captain told me last night that if I ever happened to be up here for any length of time during your watch, I had his permission to take charge, and to allow you to go below if you cared to do so. He thought that you had been having too strenuous a time lately. Now, I propose to be here for at least the next two hours; you can go below if you like. I will send down when I want you."

Thanking him, I did not require asking twice, but at once retired to the wardroom fire. The Skipper's kindly thought for me I found very touching, but that was just like him. He was a man under whom anyone worth his salt must have been proud to serve. Actually, before I again took over on that occasion, our ship got into some slight lumber. It was nobody's fault, but had I been on watch at the time the responsibility would have been mine; as it was, my yardarm was clear.

Particularly when short of sleep, I used to find night passages in fine weather rather trying. The effort to keep a good look-out through the inky blackness was something of a strain. Without warning, suddenly on occasions I would hear the rush of tumbling waters close alongside, and, looking abeam, would see the phosphorescence of a wave, surmounted by the black stem of some vessel. For the moment my mind would jump to thoughts of an attack by enemy destroyers, and my heart would thump until it

seemed that its thumping must be heard all over the ship. Taking another look, I would perceive that that which had alarmed me was merely the bow of our next astern, who, miscalculating her speed, had been sheered off in order to avoid running us down. On the very dark nights, when steaming in close order, single line ahead, it was difficult for the watch-keepers on the following vessels of the flotilla to keep exact station, and to avoid occasionally over-running their next ahead. We always led the flotilla, and in this our watch-keepers were lucky. My advice to the young and slothful is, "Always get appointed to the flag-ship, if possible. The other ships have to keep station on you, not you on them!"

CHAPTER XXI

PHOSPHORESCENT FANTASIES—A TRYING NIGHT

TALKING of phosphorescence reminds me that it often used to play us funny tricks, which, though unpleasant enough at the time, proved the subject of mirth afterwards.

Steaming through it one calm and soot-black night, thinking of nothing in particular, except, perhaps, how many minutes had yet to pass before eight bells, I was startled to see, coming directly towards the bridge of our vessel from a point perhaps half a cable on our starboard hand, a long, narrow, cigar-shaped object, travelling very fast, and below the surface of the water. Its general outline and the rate of its progress were clearly discernible, owing to the phosphorescence which surrounded it and trailed away behind in a long milky wake. Not a ripple did it make on the surface of the water.

I held my breath. Would it strike us, or pass beneath our keel? For my part, I could do nothing to avoid it. Owing to the length of our vessel, and to the speed of its approach, neither our engines nor our helm would help to avert the impending collision if this speeding monster chanced to be running nearer to the surface than the eight feet six inches which our ship drew.

After a few palpitating moments I breathed again. It had passed beneath our keel, without so much as grazing us. To port I saw it again, still speeding, and as I watched, ahead of it I observed a burst of small silvery flashes going, as would a shower of spray, in all directions, darting from its path.

Then, and then only, I knew my fears to have been groundless. That which I had taken to be a torpedo fired by some lurking enemy submarine, was merely an innocent porpoise hurrying in pursuit of a shoal of herring. Though I was at once able to see the funny side of the experience, quite a while elapsed before I regained proper control of my knees, which had quite unaccountably begun to dither and shake.

Under similar conditions of phosphorescence to those just described, a drifting mine at night appears as a luminous ring of varying width floating on the face of the water. Many, many times have I taken prompt action with the helm, or even with helm and engines, to avoid collision with such a floating luminous ring, only to perceive, on passing clear, that that particular ring was caused, not by a floating mine, but by a mere patch of seaweed! Such is life.

Sometimes, of course, the genuine article was encountered, but latterly I for one, at any rate, did not worry overmuch about them. The reason for this came about in the following manner.

Our flotilla, in conjunction with a second flotilla of a similar number of vessels, making sixteen ships in all, had been ordered to prepare to clear a German minefield off the coast of Holland. A guard of light cruisers had been detailed to protect us, as had also a party of flying-boats. All these various craft were to foregather near one of the Dutch light vessels, the Haaks, where they would be given further instructions by the Senior Officer of the light cruisers, who was in charge of the operations. Our Captain was in command of the combined minesweeping flotillas, and was responsible for the carrying out of the instructions received from the cruiser flagship.

As we approached the rendezvous lightship, evening was

closing in, and the weather was beautifully fine, with a glassy smooth sea. Between us and the lightship, and all round about, we saw, placidly floating on the face of the water, quantities of drifting mines—perhaps eighteen or twenty were in plain view from our decks at one and the same time.

Judge of our surprise, then, when we received orders from the cruiser flagship to steam backwards and forwards during the night on a given bearing from the lightship, which course would take us, each time that we passed and repassed the spot, right through the area in which these mines were drifting! However, this had nothing to do with us, our duty being to carry out such orders as we might receive. Forming in single line ahead, a cable and a half separating each ship from her next ahead, with *Penarth* leading, and steaming without lights, we started on our patrol from the Haaks to the horizon and back. Sixteen ships there were in all, and in order that the leading ships might be clear of the tail of the column when turning, the following instructions were given by our Skipper :

“ Steam on the bearing as ordered for about nine miles ; then alter course eight points to starboard. Keep going on that heading for two minutes, then alter course to starboard another eight points and steer for the lightship. Repeat this procedure at each end of the patrol, doing your utmost at each turn to check the number of ships following astern.”

I had the first watch, and did not like the thought of steaming through those mines. But why worry? If it was ordained that our ship should strike one of them, we should go up ; but if not, we should probably still be alive when the next day dawned. Poor comfort, perhaps, but it sufficed, and, anyway, I had enough to do in avoiding collisions and in trying to keep tally of our tail of following ships to wash out almost immediately all recollection of the mines from my memory.

Steaming without navigation lights as we were, a very sharp look-out had to be kept, lest some vessel, having got out of her proper position in the line, might suddenly be encountered athwart our course.

After each turn had been completed, it was always with a sense of great relief that I heard the duty signalman report that he had counted the ships, and that the tally was correct, thus confirming my own count.

To assist the next astern to keep in touch, each vessel showed a tiny light from her stern. This light consisted of a very small electric bulb fixed inside, and at the forward end of, a small-bore horizontally-mounted brass tube. Thus the light was only visible to any eye directly in line with the tube or exactly astern of the ship carrying the light. A slight divergence from the proper track, and the light would be completely screened from view. In this lay the risk of vessels losing touch with their next ahead; a very slight yaw on the part of the helmsman, and the pinpoint of light would be lost to the watch-keeper. Afterwards it would be on the knees of the gods whether or not he would be sufficiently lucky to pick it up again.

During my watch all went well until the very last turn. As midnight came we had completed our second eight-point turn more than a minute previously, and should have been steaming on a course opposite, but parallel to that of the last ships of our tail, and distant from them about a quarter of a mile. The duty signalman reported that he could not say definitely that he had seen more than eleven ships following on our wake; I, on the other hand, thought that I had counted twelve. When the Third came up to relieve me and take over the watch, I told him the position with regard to the ships of our tail.

“Even if I am right,” said I, “there are still three vessels which have not been observed. It is quite possible that

they may all be dutifully following behind, having sneaked past in the dark without being seen ; but, on the other hand, they may not, and you may encounter three or four ships in any position at any moment."

With these words I bade him good-night, and retired below to my bunk. Hardly had I turned in than I heard the ringing of the telegraph gongs in the engine-room, and at the same moment the steering engine, which was situated just abaft the bulkhead of the wardroom flat, began to rotate frantically.

"What," thought I, "is afoot? Evidently something exciting is taking place on top. Shall I turn out and go to the help of the youngster? No. If we are going to be sunk by collision, the worst will have happened before I can possibly reach the bridge—owing to the darkness, only a few seconds will elapse from the time a vessel is sighted until the collision occurs. On the other hand, if we do pass clear, I shall only be wasting valuable time by rushing on deck."

So thinking, in much less time than my thoughts take to relate, I turned over, and was almost immediately asleep.

Resuming duty at four o'clock, I inquired from the Third what all the fuss had been about shortly after I left him at midnight.

"Within a few minutes of your going below," he answered, "the thing about which you warned me happened. Two dim shapes were suddenly sighted right ahead, crossing our bows from port to starboard in a diagonal direction. Making the challenge, I ordered my helm hard astarboard, and just cleared the sides of two ships with our stem. They passed in safety, replying to our challenge as they did so. They were two of our tail which had lost touch with the line. As our head swung to port under the influence of the starboard helm, I was startled to

see another dim shape, apparently coming straight at us from about four points on our port bow. At once I ordered our helm hard aport, and the starboard engine full astern. Fortunately the oncoming vessel altered her course to starboard at the same moment. The two ships swung almost alongside each other, so close that I could easily have jumped on board the other fellow. Once more I reversed my helm, and put my starboard engine 'Full ahead,' which arrested the swing of the ship's stern and prevented actual contact. We hailed this last vessel, and found her to be the last ship of the line; she also had lost touch with her next ahead."

"Thought you must be having a lively time, from the racket the steering engine was kicking up and from the clanging of the engine-room gongs," I remarked; "but all's well that ends well. Nothing else to report, I suppose?"

"No. Otherwise, the watch has passed quite peacefully."

All this tale is rather beside the mark, I am afraid. I started out to give the reason why I did not worry overmuch about drifting mines, but the description of the situation which brought this about rather led me away from my point.

When day broke, after the incidents just related had occurred, to my great interest, and no little astonishment, I saw, floating on the surface of the water, quite as many mines as I had observed at sunset on the previous evening! For seven or eight hours sixteen ships had been steaming backwards and forwards among that clutch of mines, and no ship was one penny the worse! Evidently the danger to be anticipated from drifting mines had been much exaggerated, otherwise one or more of our vessels must have gone up that night.

To myself I explained it in this way. Providing that a mine is drifting, quite unattached, on the surface of a perfectly smooth sea, a certain displacement of the water, caused by the mass of an approaching ship's hull, tends to remove the mine to one side or other of that vessel's track, so that she does not strike it.

A floating mine, which is a mine attached to a sinker or other anchor by means of a cable or wire, but which floats on the surface, behaves quite differently. Partly displaced by the influence of the approaching mass, it may clear the bow of the oncoming ship, but when the bow has once passed, the mine is drawn in again by its cable, and comes into contact with the ship.

We were engaged in sweeping a large German mine-field off Scheveningen, on one occasion, late in the afternoon of a bright and sunny day. As the field covered a considerable area, and as it was located far out of sight of the nearest land, we placed "Dan" buoys, on which were mounted staffs carrying flags, round the margin of the field, to denote its boundaries. The field was roughly rectangular in shape, and measured perhaps ten miles east and west, by about three miles north and south.

First we placed a "Dan" buoy to denote each corner of the field, and followed this with two intermediate buoys on each of the ten-mile sides, so that the distance between buoys was from three to four miles. Taking up positions abreast in pairs, each pair working with a slight overlap on the next pair, so that we might be sure that all the ground was swept and that no mines could be missed, we proceeded to sweep round the margin of the area from buoy to buoy. As each buoy was passed, the outermost ship of the line would pick it up, while the innermost ship would drop another buoy to denote the new margin of the field.

While most of the flotilla were thus engaged, two of the

ships were detailed to follow the main body independently, for the purpose of sinking the mines by gunfire as they were brought to the surface.

Mines were plentiful, and those two ships were kept very busy sinking them—so much so, that they often dropped far astern while thus engaged, and we would lose sight of them in the heat haze which was hanging over the water.

We were in the act of making an eight-point turn for the long run to the westward, after completing the short side of the rectangle, when the Captain came up and joined me on Monkey's Island.

"Things going all right, Number One?" he inquired.

"Yes, sir, so far. But on this leg the sun, which is right ahead, makes it exceedingly difficult to pick up any object on the water."

"Find it hard to see the 'Dan' buoys? I can quite appreciate your difficulty," said he.

"I was not referring to the 'Dans,'" I assured him. "I meant the uncertainty of being able to see a mine sufficiently soon to avoid hitting it, should there be any about."

"You need not worry about mines. All the drifters are being sunk almost as soon as they show by our two ships which were detailed to deal with them."

While he was yet speaking, I reported a mine dead ahead. Promptly he ordered our helm hard aport, and himself held up a green flag to show our sweeping mate that we were altering course to starboard.

As our head swung off, the Skipper questioned: "Are you sure about that mine? I don't see anything."

To which I replied: "Certain, and you won't clear it unless you now reverse your helm and go full astern on your port engine."

To his credit he did not hesitate, but immediately gave

the necessary orders, and dowsing the green flag, showed a red one in its place.

Looking over the port side of the bridge, I reported :

“ All right, sir, it will clear our port quarter, but with very little to spare ; and,” I added, “ it’s a bally floater.”

“ Nonsense ! ” he ejaculated, joining me and looking over the side, “ it’s nothing but a German drifter.”

“ With all respect, sir, did you ever see the tide sluicing past a mine which was not moored ? ” I rejoined.

“ By Jove ! You are right,” he exclaimed. “ A close call, that.”

With a serious expression on his face, he said to me soon after :

“ I think we have done enough for one day. When we finish this run to the westward we will pack up till to-morrow.”

CHAPTER XXII

MINED—UNORTHODOX NAVIGATION—GOOD-BYE TO THE SERVICE

HARDLY were the words out of his mouth than a messenger appeared on the bridge and, saluting, handed him a signal received by wireless from one of the two ships detailed for mine sinking and now out of sight to the eastward.

“*Kendal* has struck a mine, sinking,” ran the signal.

Looking very grave, our Skipper immediately ordered sweeps to be taken in.

“Hurry down, Number One, and get our sweep in as quickly as possible. The matter is urgent. See that all hands, officers included, wear their lifebelts, and swing out the boats. I will take charge up here until you get back.”

In much less time than it takes to tell, our sweep was in, all hands were in life-jackets, and the boats swung out. Snatching my own jacket from the messenger who had been sent for it to my cabin, I raced back to the bridge and reported that all the orders had been carried out.

“Good,” said the Skipper, entirely cool and collected. “Course east eight south, and tell them to let her go her best. Get her up to full speed as soon as you can.”

Round we swung on a starboard helm and then steadied on our course, which would take us diagonally through the centre of the unswept minefield. I omitted to mention that all buoyancy floats for life-saving were cast adrift when the order to don lifebelts was given.

At the time we received the news concerning *Kendal*, we were moving at nine knots through the water. Five minutes later we were on our course at fifteen knots. Within ten minutes from the receipt of the signal we were rushing along at over eighteen knots towards *Kendal*, though the official speed of our ships on trial was only seventeen.

For the twenty-five minutes of that mad dash through the minefield *Penarth* did not falter or abate one revolution, in spite of the call for steam having come so suddenly. That the ship was being hard pressed was evident by the greatly increased vibration; the mast, forward of the bridge, set up a waggle of such intensity that at times it almost seemed as though it were about to break off, in spite of the rigging which held it.

On Monkey's Island the vibration was so considerable that on trying to look through glasses it was impossible to distinguish anything, unless the observer removed his heels from the deck and balanced himself on tiptoe.

Twenty minutes after we started on our rush to *Kendal* we had run the rest of the flotilla out of sight astern. The spectacle as we sighted *Kendal* was very interesting. There, like a winged duck, she lay, without movement. Trimming very much by the stern, and with a heavy list to port, she still floated, but deep in the water. We had arrived in time.

Telling us to stand by, our Captain took one of our boats and rowed across to *Kendal*, so that he might ascertain her exact condition for himself. Meanwhile we waited, watching anxiously to see whether *Kendal* was settling down.

In less than half an hour the Skipper returned, and told us that though her engine-room was full of water, her bulkheads were holding well, and as her stokeholds were dry she was in no immediate danger, provided the weather remained calm.

It appeared that though at first *Kendal* thought she had struck a mine, this was not so. She had been engaged in sinking mines, and had just sunk one, only puncturing its air chamber without exploding it. As it sank from view she moved ahead, to fire at another mine. While passing over the spot where the first mine had sunk a terrific explosion occurred, the concussion from which was so severe that every sea connection in her engine-room was fractured, and the water poured in.

Seemingly, that punctured mine, on reaching the sea bed, must have landed on one of its horns, and exploded exactly as *Kendal* passed. Though full six fathoms of water intervened between *Kendal* and the mine at the time of the explosion, the power of the mine was sufficient to cause severe damage.

Much of this information we did not, of course, ascertain until *Kendal* had been subsequently carefully examined.

Detailing one of the flotilla to tow her damaged sister, and another to act as convoy, to the nearest port, some thirty miles distant, our Skipper resumed normal routine with the balance of our ships.

Some days later, while we were lying in Harwich, I was walking on deck in the evening with our Skipper, and chatting on various matters of interest.

"It seems to me strange," said I, "how accustomed we get to minesweeping, and how little thought we give to the attendant risks which are inseparable from the job. That is to say, except immediately on returning after being away on leave. During my first watch following my return to duty I personally am always terribly scared, fully expecting to go up at any moment."

"Perhaps," replied the Skipper, "it is just as well that we do forget the risks. I feel absolutely certain that if a man were to be fully alive to the risks for a consecutive three

weeks, he would spend the rest of his existence in a mad-house."

I fully agreed with the Captain's views, remembering as I did that but few of our Navigators were able to survive for more than three weeks without suffering severe nervous breakdown.

"By the way," went on the Skipper, "you know that field we were sweeping off Scheveningen, when *Kendal* received damage? Any idea of the depths at which those mines were laid?"

"No, sir," said I, "though I began to think that they were too shallow to be healthy when we sighted that floater. Anyhow, I hoped devoutly that he would prove to be an exception, and that he had come up accidentally."

"Two metres was the depth at which that field was laid, and we draw eight feet and a half of water—and we were sweeping at all states of the tide," said the Skipper. "I was not informed until afterwards. Aren't you glad that you did not know? Ignorance is bliss, sometimes."

Thinking over all that happened while we were sweeping that field, I was filled with astonishment that we were still alive.

About the ordinary, moderately deep-laid minefield we did not worry overmuch, as, providing the mines were uniformly moored to their true pre-determined depth, there was usually sufficient water over them to permit of our passing clear without much risk of accident.

Sometimes we received unpleasant surprises. One very quiet and misty day we unexpectedly found ourselves surrounded by the floats of mined nets. Evidently a net had got out of position in the last gale, and had not been observed.

Immediately the floats were seen our propellers were stopped, as a kind of forlorn hope that we might drift

clear without catching in the net. With bated breath we watched the little globular floats bobbing on every side of us, expecting at any moment to feel that concussion which would mean the destruction of our ship.

Minutes passed, and to us each minute seemed an hour in length. At last it was noticeable that the bobbing floats were trending towards our bows, which indicated that our vessel was gradually slipping stern first away from the nets.

We did not dare to move our engines in order to assist her, but were compelled to leave her to extricate herself from her dangerous position unaided.

After the passing of what seemed an age, to our joy we saw the last of those wretched little floats pass clear of our bow. Our ship was saved, and we breathed freely once more. Fortunately for us, in that particular part of the sea where we usually worked these nets seldom got out of position. They were not enemy nets, so we knew exactly where they were laid, and consequently could always avoid them without difficulty, provided that they remained moored on their proper stations.

I have said that we did not worry overmuch about the ordinary minefield, and that is true of those of us who had been engaged in sweeping for some time. When I came new to the game, a minefield to me was a minefield, no matter what its character might be, and I was therefore badly scared whenever there was any prospect of our approaching one.

We had left the Dutch coast one day, bound homeward to Grimsby for coal, when I had been serving in *Penarth* less than a fortnight, and knew next to nothing about minefields but had a horror of them, owing to a lively appreciation of their effects. It was midnight as we approached the English land, and mine was the middle watch. The night

was dark as pitch, the wind was strong from the south-west and a considerable sea was running.

As I went up top to take over the watch, I encountered, on reaching Monkey's Island, the Navigator and the Third, who had been keeping the first watch. My arrival interrupted a wordy argument which was in progress between the two.

"Good morning, everybody. And what's all the noise about?" I inquired, addressing the Navigator.

"We differ as to the present position of the ship," said he. "We agree that we have made good about one hundred miles since we last got a departure, but the Third is of opinion that we are nearly ten miles north of the position where I hope and think we are at the present moment. Along this coast are two big minefields, separated by a gap of a little more than a mile in width. If I am right, we are steering straight for that gap; but if his is the correct view, then we shall shortly be in the middle of the northern field. I trust he is wrong, as I would much prefer not to pass through the minefield, having regard to the time of tide and the size of the sea which is running."

He therefore gave me the course to steer and the estimated position of the ship. Telling me to alter course and to take whatever action I might think necessary as occasion arose, without first consulting him, and to advise him as soon as possible after making any alteration, he went below. The Third, after formally handing over charge of the ship to me, also left me, remarking as he did so:

"Well, so long, old dear. Enjoy yourself, won't you? Mine is the better part, and I don't envy you one bit."

A cheerful outlook for me! Steaming twelve knots towards an invisible rocky coast, in half a gale of wind, pitch dark, uncertain of the ship's position, leading a flotilla running without lights, perhaps through open water,

perhaps through a minefield, no lights ashore or any aids to navigation, not even able to take a cast of the lead lest we should be over the minefield, hoping against hope that I would sight the loom of the land in sufficient time to enable me to alter course before running my ship on to the rock-strewn coast.

My thoughts were far from happy ones ; indeed, to tell the truth, I was in a blithering funk, though I comforted myself a little with the idea that, should I ever see peacetime again, no passage made at night under peace conditions could possibly cause me even one moment's anxiety. Perhaps this was but feeble comfort, but, nevertheless, it was undoubtedly better than pondering on present difficulties.

After staring for perhaps half an hour into the blackness ahead, suddenly I thought I detected the loom of high cliffs. Though this appearance might only be caused by a cloud-bank, I dared not carry on. At once I altered course to port a sufficient number of points to put us on a line parallel with that part of the coast, and sent a message to the Navigator to tell him that I had done so.

While we were making our turn, a burst of flame from the funnel of our next astern lit up for about a minute the two or three adjacent vessels of the flotilla, and at the same time completely dazzled me, so that I could see nothing in the direction where the land should be.

As the flame died down I perceived a tiny winking light on our starboard bow. Not being able to make out what the light might be, I took its bearing and noted the time. It appeared to me to be winking in a peculiar manner, and, merely as a matter of curiosity, I got out a stop-watch and timed the winks, finding them to bear a certain definite sequence, which I noted. When the light had moved aft sufficiently to double the contained angle between the original bearing and the head of our ship, I again noted the

time and the bearing of the light. Almost immediately afterwards the light entirely disappeared.

Meanwhile, when I first observed the light I notified the Navigator of the fact.

Soon after the light was no longer visible the Navigator joined me, and wished me to point out the light. After explaining that it was no longer to be seen, I went over in detail the action that I had taken, and pointed out on the chart what I believed to be our exact position.

“While that light was visible I got a four-point bearing,” said I, “and this four-pointer makes the light distant, at the time of the second bearing, three miles. I timed the character of the light, and find that it agrees with the character of a local lighthouse. Therefore I assume that the position which I showed you is correct.”

“But,” objected the Navigator, “no lighthouse on this coast is allowed to show a light, so you must be mistaken.”

“Can’t help that; I saw it,” said I, rather snappily, I am afraid, as I had been going through a trying time, and was therefore not disposed to argue with the Navigator, who had not been on deck to see for himself. With a grunt, which might have meant anything or nothing, the pilot went below again, and left me to carry on.

With the approach of four o’clock the Skipper arrived on top, and asked me whether I had seen anything during my watch, and what was the ship’s present position.

I told him that I estimated we were running parallel with the coast, and distant from it some three to four miles; also that we should have Flamborough Head abeam in about another twenty minutes, but that I had seen nothing except what I took to be the lamp of a lighthouse. A few minutes later I reported to the Captain, “Flamborough Head bears south-west, sir.”

“How do you know? Have you seen it?”

"No, sir. But did you notice, when you came on deck, that the ship was running in smooth water, whereas now she is meeting a head sea?"

"I had not noticed until you mentioned it; but what has that to do with the bearing of the Head?"

"The wind," I replied, "is strong from the south-west, and when you first came on deck we were running in smooth water under the lee of the Head. Now that we have got the Head open, you can feel the ship lifting to the sea, as we are no longer protected by the land. Therefore I take it that when the Old Lady first began to jump she had Flamborough Head bearing approximately south-west."

"Umph!" remarked the Skipper, evidently a little impressed.

Next time I saw him I inquired whether he had found the positions which I had given him correct, when daylight enabled him to check them.

"Yes," he answered in reply to my question. "We made the Head exactly, both with regard to time and distance. But I still don't understand about that lighthouse which you say showed a light."

Some weeks afterwards we got the explanation of that also. It appeared the lighthouse keeper had received orders from the Admiralty that, as a flotilla of destroyers was due to pass north in the early hours of the morning, he was to show his light, but at greatly reduced power, from three o'clock until three-thirty, to enable those in charge of the destroyers to definitely fix their position. Seeing the flame from the funnel of our next astern, the lighthouse keeper concluded either that his instructions were wrong, or else the destroyer flotilla had arrived ahead of time. Fearing the possibility of the destroyers reporting that the promised light was not being exhibited when they passed, he decided to take the risk of showing the light then as well

as later. It was therefore the flaming funnel, followed by the action of the lighthouse keeper, which enabled me to fix our position when making the land.

The war ended at last, and, to my regret, it was announced that our Captain was leaving us to take over charge of the shore end of the sweeping operations. Actually, the fact that he accepted this new appointment was probably the means of saving my life, though he does not know it.

Anxious as I was to get back to civilian occupations after the armistice, the pleasure of serving under my Skipper would have outweighed all other considerations, and I would have stuck by the ship. But when he went ashore, and new people were appointed to *Penarth*, I looked about for the very first chance to get out. Not that the new people were not as nice as they could be—they were very jolly and most pleasant to work with; still, without my old Skipper something was missing. No longer did I feel any special urge to remain in the Navy.

To the new Captain I put my views, and he very kindly agreed to have me relieved as soon as he could arrange it. Several trips I made with him, but my heart was not in the work. The peace-time Navy bored me; there was no further interest in the game.

Towards the end of January 1919 my relief turned up, and I finally said good-bye to my old ship and to those of my friends who still remained with her. Little did I think, as I stepped ashore from her for the last time, that when she next went to sea she would be lost, but that was what happened. A mine got her in the forward stokehold, shortly to be followed by another in the after stokehold, and *Penarth* was no more. A strong south-easter was blowing, with flurries of snow, when she went. The water was bitterly cold, and even strong swimmers could not survive for more than a few minutes. All hands in the

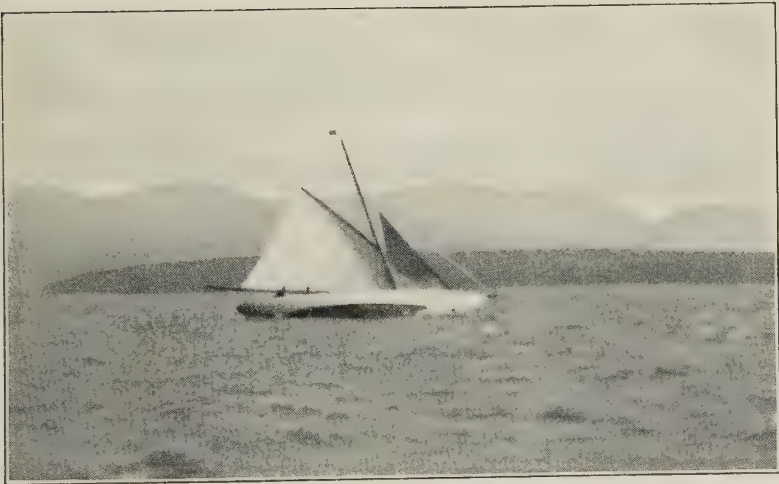
stokeholds were killed by the explosions, and many others were drowned, due to the cold, before they could be picked up by the boats from other vessels of the flotilla, which hastened to the rescue. Altogether about forty-six lives were lost in this disaster, and among them were many of my friends, though some survived. Good chaps they were, without exception ; but they died as they would have wished to die, doing their duty.

The survivors were sent on leave for a while, to give them a chance to recover from the shock of their experience, and on the termination of their leave they were all appointed to the next senior ship of the flotilla.

Strange are the ways of Fate ! Next time, following their joining, that this ship went to sea, she found a mine, which struck her aft, and she also sank, but fortunately without loss of life. There is no doubt that my Captain did me a good turn when he took that shore appointment.



H.M. SLOOP "PENARTH."



"IOMHAR" OFF BEAUMARIS.

CHAPTER XXIII

RESUMED HOLIDAYS AFLOAT

THOUGH I had put in the best part of five years almost continuously at sea in one kind of craft or another, I entered on peace-time looking forward keenly to the prospect of once more spending holidays afloat.

At the very first opportunity I paid a visit to *Iomhar* where she was laid up and had been lying high and dry since the first year of the war. She seemed to have suffered remarkably little, and a good overhaul soon made her again ready for sea.

Much of my pre-war sailing time had been occupied in racing, but for the first year or so after the armistice racing was at a discount. I therefore decided in June 1919 to go on an extended cruise, and to leave racing alone for the time being. My old racing crew were scattered by the war, some of them irretrievably lost to us by marriage, but I managed to collect one or two—to wit, "Camel" and Robert, and Robert's eldest son, known as "Filth," his name being Philip. He joined us in the later days of *Eureka II*, when a callow youth of fifteen, and though constantly chased round by the crew for some seasons, showed but little sign of activity or brilliance. He joined the Army, and though awarded the Military Medal and a bar to same, returned to us alive after the war minus a large section of one thigh-bone and totally deaf in one ear; quite a bright lad, but uncertain of the groggy leg, which was apt to let him down at unexpected moments. Sufficient in

number for cruising, away we went, bound from the Mersey to the Clyde.

Our intention was to cruise round the various lochs in the Clyde district for about a fortnight before returning to the Mersey, and knowing that in many of these out-of-the-way places we should not be able to rely on obtaining a boat from the beach should we wish to go ashore, we took our own dinghy along. *Iomhar* being much too small to take any sort of dinghy on board, the only alternative remaining to us was to tow the dinghy astern.

Another of my friends—his first time in the ship—unable to join before we left the Mersey, was to make his own way to Largs, on the Clyde. There he was due at three-thirty on the Tuesday afternoon, and we were to call and pick him up. He was well over six feet in height, large in proportion, and known as “The Cat,” possibly on account of his smile, though the authentic derivation of the name has been lost in the passage of time.

Leaving the Mersey at high water on the Saturday morning with the dinghy in tow, the outlook was excellent: a high and steady barometer, a light westerly breeze, and a perfectly smooth sea. We set everything, including our topsail, and tramped along at a steady five knots until we had covered perhaps half the distance to the Isle of Man. Then a change seemed to be coming over the weather. The sky, which had been a beautiful clear blue when we started, became overcast, and the wind began to veer and freshen. At the same time the barometer showed a decided tendency to fall.

The wind continued to veer until we could no longer lie our course for the Maughold Head, near Ramsey. We had just made up our minds that as soon as we had finished a meal which was then in progress we would put her round on to the starboard tack, and take that opportunity to lower

and stow the topsail, as we did not like the look of the weather, when there was a twanging snap somewhere aloft, and the whole boat shook as though her mast was about to fall out of her.

Rushing on deck, we saw that the wire of the port topmast shroud had carried away. Instantly Bob, who was at the helm, put her round on to starboard tack, and the mast was saved.

Calling the rest of the crew on deck, the topsail was soon down and stowed, but not now satisfied with this, we still further snugged her down by reducing the mainsail with the roller reefing gear to about two-thirds of its full area.

Meanwhile the sea was getting up and the wind hardening. Even under the smaller canvas, *Iomhar* had as much sail as she could comfortably carry, but we were anxious to drive her as much as possible, in order to get in under the shelter of the Isle of Man at the earliest moment. For some hours we carried on, staggering over the seas when we managed to dodge them, and through them sometimes when an error of judgment permitted them to fall aboard.

Wet and miserable were we, and wet and deep in the water was our unfortunate dinghy becoming. Something must be done about it—this kind of thing could not continue. We could not do anything in the way of baling out the dinghy, as the size of the waves made anything of the kind impossible. Nothing for it but to reduce sail still further, and thus ease our impetuous rushes.

Heaving to, we reefed our mainsail until we could reduce it no further; by then the jaws of the gaff were right down on the boom. Filling away on her once more, considerable improvement was to be noticed in her behaviour. No longer did she go through the waves, but instead got over most of them with very little assistance from the helmsman. The dinghy, on the other hand, was still having a poor time,

and gradually took more and more water aboard, until she was up to the thwarts.

All this time we were keeping a sharp look-out for the land, but not a sign of it could we see. From dead reckoning we had about run our distance, and the land should be close aboard. Murky it undoubtedly was, but it did not appear to be in any way thick—indeed, we estimated that we could see at least five miles. Almost were we beginning to wonder whether the island had sunk during the night, when suddenly “Camel,” who was then at the helm, sung out :

“There’s the land ! ”

“Where away ? ” I inquired.

“Up there,” and he pointed overhead !

Gosh ! The man was right. Seemingly right above us was to be seen the hard line of a cliff edge.

Blowing hard as it was, the various noises on board had prevented our hearing the water breaking on the rocks, and what we had taken for the deepening murkiness of a dirty day was actually the loom of the land itself.

Even close in to the land as we then were a considerable sea was running, which was caused by the tide, but which prevented our noticing any reduction of the sea due to the lee of the land. Almost immediately after the helmsman’s shout the mist cleared away, and the land stood clearly revealed. We saw that it was the high ground just south of the Maughold Head, for which we were making.

Perhaps under such protection as the land gave we might be able to empty some of the water out of the dinghy ; anyway, we would try. Bringing her close alongside, we tried to lift her nose up on to our deck, in order to tip the water out over her stern, but the surge of the waves defeated us, and we were forced to launch her again without having achieved much result. As she went aft, on being re-

launched, her painter happened to catch on one of our brass fairleads, and the weight coming on the painter, the fairlead was torn from its fastenings and flicked, like a stone from a catapult, fully a hundred feet away from the ship, before finally striking the water.

Feeling that while we were close in under the cliffs we must be receiving some protection from the land, and knowing that once we opened Maughold Head on our way to the harbour on the other side of Ramsey Bay we should lose that protection, we thought it best still further to reduce our canvas.

Accordingly, while still hove-to under the land we lowered and stowed the mainsail—this leaving us with nothing except the mizzen, the staysail, and a small jib. The tide being fair, we soon covered the ground to Maughold Head, and as we got round the corner the full force of the wind came down upon us. Even with the small rags of sail which we were showing, *Iomhar* was hard pressed. As the wind struck us, so she heeled; the whole of her lee side went under water, then her covering board, then the first plank of her deck. How much further would she go? Over further, and still further, she went, until the water completely covered the second plank of the lee deck. Then she found her bearings, and tore across the bay, still towing the half-submerged dinghy.

In the bay itself the water was smooth, but so hard did the wind blow that the whole surface was a mass of white water and driving spume. Each little wavelet as it struck our weather side burst into spray, and sprang vertically upwards, only to be again caught by the wind and carried across us and away far to leeward in the form of heavy mist. The tide was ebbing fast, and it became a question whether we should be able to reach the harbour in time to get within its shelter before the water should have ebbed too far for us to enter.

Thanks to the wind being abeam, and to its gale force, we managed to make the harbour, and to pass within the line of its protecting piers with perhaps a foot of water to spare. Peace after storm, and I, for one, was thankful, though I always dislike being in a place where my vessel cannot lie afloat. That evening I was not inclined to be critical, feeling, as I did, that to be in a safe harbour, even where it was necessary to dry out, was infinitely preferable to being outside, particularly as the barometer still pursued its downward way.

The next morning opened very bright, with a strong south-west wind blowing and the barometer still falling. Local talent advised us not to proceed, as there was dirty weather in store. However, a south-west wind was a free wind, we were due at Largs on the Tuesday afternoon, and it was now Sunday. Under the circumstances we decided that we must go. Possibly the wind would veer after the weight of the blow was over, and if that should happen we would not reach Largs in time to pick up "The Cat."

Accordingly, we got under way as soon as the tide served, setting only the same canvas as we had carried the previous evening: small jib, staysail and mizzen. We knew that we were in for bad weather, and it was better to start out with too little canvas rather than with too much. It is an easy matter to set extra sail if required, but to reduce the quantity already set is not by any means always so simple. Another little vessel of about our own size left the harbour, bound north round the Point of Air, a few minutes ahead of us, and we followed her out. We afterwards heard that she was lost that day, though her crew were saved.

For a time after leaving the harbour we got along very nicely. The sun was shining brightly, and the wind, though strong, was fair. As we left the Point of Air astern the waves began to increase, and the dinghy started making

wild rushes from side to side as she was hurried forward by the following sea. At the extreme end of each rush, when the weight came on her painter, she would check with a jerk, and as she checked some water would splash on board over her rail.

As time went on, more and more water got into the dinghy by this means, until, when we were about half-way between the Point of Air and Mull of Galloway, she had acquired so much loose water that on reaching the end of one of her wild rushes the jerk of the painter completely capsized her, and she towed bottom up.

Even then she was not satisfied; from time to time she would roll over and over, sometimes right side up, and sometimes with little else than her keel visible.

Conditions remained much the same over the remainder of the first ebb tide, but with the making of the flood, which ran against the wind, a heavy sea arose, with big hollow-faced waves and foaming crests. The wind increased to gale force, the sky clouded over, and heavy driving rain shut out the Mull of Galloway from view, so that at times no land was visible.

I began to feel a good deal scared, and to wonder if our little ship would be able to survive the gale. The dinghy, with the increase in the size of the sea, was more frequently right side up. Often while in this position she would receive a sudden jerk from her painter, which had the effect of throwing out over her stern about half of the water which filled her. Then she would resume her wild rushes, until at last she once more capsized and carried on as before. As a variation of her standard performance, when right side up and directly astern of us, instead of rushing to one side or the other until brought up by her painter, she would balance herself on the overfalling crest of a wave, and thus poised on the advancing face of the water, charge down upon us as

though trying to get on board her parent ship. Usually her energy spent itself before she reached us, or she turned aside one way or the other, and again dropped back to the full scope of her painter, only to receive another fierce jerk when she reached the end.

The tremendous jerks and drags of the dinghy made things most uncomfortable aboard *Iomhar*, and we were in two minds whether or not to cut the painter and allow her to go adrift; she, however, saved us the trouble of coming to a decision on the matter. Seated below in the cabin, I happened to look aft through the companion hatch, and was interested to see the dinghy clear above the mizzen masthead. She hung for a moment poised on the crest of a huge comber, and while I watched, fascinated, down the face of the wave she rushed straight at us.

"Look, 'Camel,'" I shouted to the helmsman, "what is behind you!"

He looked, and saw.

"Dink's coming aboard," he remarked, in a quiet conversational tone, for all the world as though it was a usual habit of hers, and that the fact of her doing so was perfectly normal behaviour. He was right, she did; this time she failed to stay her mad rush, but came straight on. She hit the bumpkin, and carried it away. Still on she came, right on board, until she struck the mizzen mast. This stopped her and prevented her reaching the helmsman. There she lay for a few moments on our afterdeck, like a stranded fish, amidst the wreckage of the bumpkin and mixed up with the mizzen boom, which she had also carried away.

But the next wave to come along raised her up and carried her clear. Astern she swept, until she reached the limit of her painter. Once again that painter tried to check her. There was a terrific jar and a twang, then silence. The limit of the painter had been reached in two senses, the

second of these being the limit of its endurance. Under the excessive strain to which it had been subjected the painter had parted, and now the dinghy floated away free of all control.

"Thank goodness she's gone," said I, greatly relieved that she had spared us the necessity of cutting her adrift.

After the loss of the dinghy, which occurred while we were passing Black Head, *Iomhar* moved much more freely, as was only to be expected, but even now the greatest care had to be exercised by the helmsman in order to prevent her broaching-to under the influence of the really immense waves which roared and foamed all around. These waves broke ahead of us, they broke sometimes on one side of us and sometimes on the other, but never directly astern. Had they done so we should have been swept from stern to stem.

Frequently we scurried, for what seemed to be ages, with the first ten feet of our bows buried deep in the back of a wave; often the whole fore end of the vessel was lost to view under the water right up to the mast. All the time *Iomhar*, struggling to get her head off to port or starboard in order to escape the thrust of a wave under her stern, required the most strenuous efforts on "Camel's" part to keep her on a straight course.

Again, when the waves happened to be of slightly smaller size, *Iomhar* would bury her head in one wave, while her long counter was tucked in under the wave next astern; both the foredeck and the afterdeck were then submerged at the same time.

Evening was drawing in, and there was no sign of any improvement in the weather—still raining hard and blowing great guns, while the barometer went down and down, as though it would never cease to fall.

Had it been daybreak instead of evening, we might have risked carrying on to the northward. But, to be candid, I

feared what might happen should darkness come upon us while such a sea was running. Therefore we decided to round Corsewall Lighthouse and seek shelter in Loch Ryan.

Putting our quarter to the sea—we dared not alter course more than a couple of points or so—we edged in towards the shore, and kept on the new course until we were sheltered from the sea and wind by Corsewall Point. Once in smooth water, the mainsail was set, and we made a record passage up the Loch, to seek an anchorage off Stranraer. Going up the loch the rain stopped, but daylight was rapidly waning, so it behoved us to push along if we were to get our anchor down before dark. This we just managed, and the anchor plopped over the bow less than half an hour after Corsewall Lighthouse lit its lamp. Rapidly we stowed sails, hoisted our riding light, and made all snug for the night. Then, with a sigh of relief, all hands went below to try and dry their clothes and to forage for food.

Though we had been under way since seven that morning, and it was now close on midnight, except for a biscuit or a piece of chocolate snatched at odd moments we had eaten nothing on the passage from Ramsey. Fortunately, knowing that the weather was likely to be bad, we had all had breakfast before leaving harbour.

Next day, Monday, it blew a whole living gale all day. At the outset we decided to shelter, and not to attempt to continue the passage until the following morning. By remaining where we were for the day we might have fine weather for the passage. On the other hand, should the south-west gale continue, we would have ample time to get to Largs by starting on the Tuesday morning.

Nothing of interest happened on the Monday, except that while the good Robert was doing a job of work on deck he lost his cap overside. Having no dinghy, we had no means of retrieving the cap other than by getting under weigh.

Accordingly, setting staysail and mizzen only, we weighed, and went in pursuit of the cap. It was only then that we appreciated the force of the wind; as we wore round after the cap we heeled over to the third plank of the deck, in spite of the mere rag of canvas which we were showing to the wind. The cap was duly picked up, and we returned to our original anchorage, having occupied a total of only ten minutes from the time the cap went overboard until the anchor was once more on the ground and all sail stowed.

Had confirmation been required of the wisdom of our decision to remain where we were for the day, this little incident would have provided it.

Tuesday morning opened fine, with a gentle south-west wind and a slowly rising glass. Five o'clock saw us passing out of Loch Ryan under all plain sail, bound north. Once outside, it was evident that the weather was really on the mend, so we set the topsail, and after breakfast had been eaten and washing up completed, this was followed by the spinnaker. Would we be in time to keep our appointment at Largs? The tide was fair, and if the wind held we should just be able to manage it.

Northward we sped at a fine pace, a pleasant breeze blowing to temper the heat of a brilliant sun. All went well, and we dropped anchor off Largs at exactly five minutes past three that afternoon, just twenty-five minutes to the good, after one of the most interesting passages from the Mersey that I have ever undertaken.

In small boat work it is not always the big sea which presents most difficulties. Often the smaller sea is really the more dangerous and troublesome to negotiate. Once, in 1920, we were bound to the Menai Straits from the Mersey, and, as is frequently the case, the wind was westerly. Making our way down the channel at the entrance to the Mersey we encountered big waves, but as, owing to the

strength of the wind, we were under headsails and mizzen only, we reached the Bar without trouble.

Arrived off the Bar, the flood tide was just beginning to make. With the wind from the westward the flood is a lee-going stream, and we were, therefore, able to do little more than hold our own for the next six hours. On the change of the tide the ebb helped us to windward, and we travelled far on our way. But the flood tide made again before we rounded the Great Orme's Head, which lies west of Llandudno. There the flood stream met us, and we tacked about backwards and forwards, trying to get round the Head, for hours and hours. The tide race, which is usually to be found near outstanding points of land, made a nasty short chop of sea, and necessitated careful nursing of the ship by the helmsman if she were to be kept moving and free of water.

With the passing of midnight we succeeded in rounding the Head, and there found smoother water. Relinquishing the helm to "The Cat," tired out after some sixteen hours of steering, I went below to get a rest and to relax my stiffened muscles.

The water was certainly much smoother, but as I lay below I could hear the waves constantly breaking on board over the weather bow. Once on board, the water would rush along the deck, and, reaching the weather coaming of the cockpit, overflow the coaming, and some part of it find its way below. Wave after wave behaved in precisely the same manner, but I was too tired to care, and, anyway, it was "The Cat" who was getting wet, so why worry? Except for a certain amount of water collecting in the bilge, the ship was none the worse.

Towards daylight I again took charge with "Filth," whilst the "Cat" and the Major, who had had the watch, went and lay down, one on either settee in the cabin.

As we made progress to the westward the sea went down

appreciably, consequently there was no special effort required to prevent the water washing over us. When daylight came, and we were approaching our destination, I bethought me that the time had arrived when it would be as well to clear the bilge of the water which had there accumulated during the middle watch.

To my watchmate "Filth" I imparted my idea, at the same time expressing the opinion that the two members of the crew not on duty had had sufficient sleep, and that I saw no reason why they should not turn out and free the ship of the water taken aboard during their watch on deck.

"Watch me call the watch below," I said. "Take a peep down the cabin hatch, and tell me what you see."

Timing my opportunity, as a suitably large wave approached I put my helm up sharply, thus bringing the starboard quarter of *Iomhar* to the face of the sea.

As was expected, *Iomhar* did a sort of buckjump, and at the same moment listed sharply to port.

From below came a chorus of shouts, showing that the watch below had been well and truly awakened. When *Iomhar* made her buck, she picked up the "Cat," occupying the starboard settee, and without giving him time to reach the cabin floor, she threw him across the intervening space, right on the top of the Major, on the port settee, much to the delight of "Filth," who viewed the performance down the hatch.

Now that both were awake they were told to bale, and a considerable undertaking they found it. In all, they abstracted full fifty-two buckets of water from that bilge.

Though the distance from point to point was only about fifty miles, the time occupied on that particular passage was twenty-three hours, and the only water which was shipped by *Iomhar* came aboard after the waves became relatively small in size.

CHAPTER XXIV

A WEEK-END POWER PASSAGE

WHILE most of my holidays afloat since the War have been in sail, I have occasionally made a passage or two in power-driven craft of one sort or another.

A friend of mine, living at Rockcliffe on the south-west coast of Scotland, not far from Dumfries, owned a thirty-five foot seaplane tender, which he wished to lay up for the winter at Bangor, North Wales. He asked me whether I would take her to Bangor for him, and I agreed to do so, as the distance was not more than a hundred miles, which could easily be covered during a week-end, including going by train to Scotland and returning in the same way from Bangor.

These seaplane tenders are best described as open boats, decked for about half their length from forward, of narrow beam, and of light draft. They were designed for speed, and with their original engines could usually knock up fifteen knots in smooth water. *Foam*, the boat of which I was to take charge, had been altered by having her original machinery removed, and a smaller petrol-driven car engine, a 30-H.P. Daimler, had been fitted in its place. As altered, her full speed in smooth water was about twelve knots.

I induced another friend of mine to sign on for the trip, and together we arrived at the little Scottish port where the boat was lying late one Saturday afternoon. When we got there we found that the tide was out, and that *Foam* was lying on the mud.

Being anxious to take stock of her while there was yet

daylight, we trudged out there and then and looked her over.

Her owner explained that her normal consumption of petrol was round about two gallons per hour, that her main fuel tank was full and that it held sixteen gallons. In order that we should not run short of fuel on the passage, he had loaded on board, in tins, a further sixteen gallons of spirit, besides spare lubricating oil sufficient to run her for several days.

High water would be about twelve o'clock at night, but as we did not care to adventure down the Solway Firth in an entirely strange boat during the hours of darkness, we decided to postpone our start until noon on the Sunday, by which hour *Foam* would be afloat and there would be plenty of water in the channel to allow us to go straight out.

On Sunday morning the weather seemed far from attractive. Dull and gloomy, it was not actually raining, but a strong wind was blowing up the Firth from the southwest, a head wind for us on our run to Bangor. Even while the flood tide was flowing in the same direction as the wind, whitecaps were clearly to be seen outside where the land afforded no shelter.

Local opinion thought the weather unsuitable for our projected trip, and said so definitely. Personally I was a little troubled by the fact that the owner of *Foam* wished us to take her dinghy along; this meant towing the beastly thing, as she was far too big to take on board, and I feared that we might lose her before we reached our destination.

"But," said he, in answer to my objections, "I should be much happier if I was able to feel that you had a dinghy with you, in case of accidents."

"Very well, I will take her, but only on the distinct understanding that you don't hold me responsible if I lose her. Should she break adrift I shall not attempt to pick her

up; and if she becomes too much of an embarrassment I shall cut her painter and allow her to sink or swim just as she pleases," I told him.

On this understanding, after a brief run round the bay with the owner on board to show us how to handle the engine controls, we put to sea. Another boat accompanied us, and took off the owner before we got clear of the shelter of the land.

Quite convinced that we were mad, our friends bade us "Farewell," and heading their boat back to port, left us to pursue our way alone.

Soon we got out from under the lee of the land, and then the force of the wind became clearly apparent. *Foam* began to kick and plunge in the head sea, so that we were forced to slow her down from the ten knots, at which we had been running, to something less than seven. For a while we went along fairly comfortably, and then the ebb tide started to run out under the wind.

The waves shortened and became more steep, and *Foam* constantly ducked her nose under them, so that we had to slow her still further; and, as even then the waves were apt to come on board, we altered course a couple of points, bringing the waves on to her shoulder instead of right ahead.

For perhaps an hour we continued in this fashion, making good weather of it, but so slowly was the engine turning that we remained almost in the one spot.

This could not go on indefinitely, as all the time we were burning petrol, but making little or no progress towards our destination.

"I'll shake her up, and chance it," I said to my shipmate, though I began to wonder whether or not we had been fools to venture out in such a sea.

Gradually I opened up the throttle, until we were going along at perhaps five knots through the water, still with the

sea on our shoulder, but taking practically nothing on board. Feeling that all was going well, for a moment I allowed my attention to wander—and that did it!

Into a big wave *Foam* promptly dug her nose. Solid water surged along the foredeck and over the break of it into the boat. The engine was completely swamped by the water, and with an expiring cough it died. My shipmate and I were soaked through, though of that we thought little at the time, having other and more important matters on hand to occupy our attention.

The engine being stopped, *Foam* must broach-to. How would she lie? Would she ride it out? These were the most urgent questions at the moment.

Slowly her head paid off until she lay beam on to the waves; but she did not stop there, and to encourage her to pay off still further, I put the helm hard up. She put in some fierce rolls while falling away from the sea, but not one drop of water did she ship. Finally she came to rest with the sea well abaft the beam, and so rode quite happily.

“Thank goodness!” said I, with a sigh of relief. “Now I don’t care if it snows, or if the engine does break down every few minutes.”

My shipmate received my remarks with an astonished stare, obviously wondering what I meant. I explained.

“A little time ago I began to wonder whether or not we were fools to have started. I did not then know how our vessel would behave in a seaway with the engine stopped. That last wave made the test for us, and now I am perfectly happy, whatever happens. From now on we enjoy ourselves.”

Just then the dinghy came alongside to pay us a visit. She was a wretched nuisance, that dinghy; while we were hove-to one hand was constantly engaged in keeping her clear.

In the intervals between pushing off the dinghy we sponged and dried, to the best of our ability, the water which

had smothered the engine. In about ten minutes we managed to get going once more on our course for Bangor.

The weather must have known that we no longer cared for it, as from the moment that *Foam* demonstrated how comfortably she could lie-to with her engine stopped, the weather began to improve. The wind blew less strongly, the sea gradually moderated, and, best of all, the sun came out and started to dry our sodden clothes.

The dinghy had not escaped entirely, and she was heavy to tow, on account of the quantity of water she had shipped while we were coming down the Firth. By the time we were abreast of the Isle of Man, and some ten miles distant from it, the sea had smoothed sufficiently to make possible some attention to the dinghy.

Slowing *Foam* down, we hauled in on the dinghy's painter until she came within reach; then we transhipped my mate, with instructions to sit down and hold on until we got going again, after which he was to set to work and bale. Everything went according to plan, and I shortly had the pleasure of seeing him signal to indicate that he had completed his task.

To take him aboard again, though a risky proceeding, occupied only a few moments, and was successfully accomplished.

The day was drawing on, and as we had then been under way for seven hours, the time seemed ripe to transfer some petrol from the spare tins to the fuel tank, while the water remained moderately smooth. The filling plug for the tank was situated on one side of the deck, well forward. To carry out the operation of filling, a screwed cap had to be removed and a filler inserted in the aperture. The operator seated himself on the deck, with his legs hanging overside in order to try to maintain his balance. His hands were fully occupied with the petrol tin from which he poured

and with the filler, which he had to steady in its place while pouring. No hand was therefore available with which to hold on, but that did not really matter, as, in any event, there was nothing but the bare deck to hold on by, and hands are of very little use for that purpose. He had to hang on by "sticktion," if I may coin the word to explain my meaning, and use his feet and legs to counterbalance the weight of his body.

It was something of an acrobatic feat, that refilling of the tank, but it was safely carried out, with the loss of only a few odd drops of petrol.

"Let's make hay while the sun shines," said we, "and see what the old girl can do, now that the going is good."

Accordingly, we whacked her up from the eight hundred and fifty revolutions per minute at which we had been running, gradually, revolution by revolution, until she was turning at nearly thirteen hundred.

Chancing to glance aft, we observed that the dinghy had assumed a pose of complete astonishment. Instead of towing in the normal manner, she was balanced on her extreme tail and standing almost vertically upright, much more like a sentry box than a self-respecting dinghy. However, she seemed to come along quite nicely in that position, and as she had nothing loose on board which she could tip out behind, we did not worry about her, but carried on at full speed.

Two hours of this fast running had passed without special incident, when suddenly the engine emitted a huge sneeze, followed by a second and smaller one, then stopped entirely. A brief search showed that she had emptied her tank. This would not do at all—she had used more than three gallons of petrol per hour during the past two hours. At this rate, we had not nearly enough fuel on board to complete our journey. Obviously something would have to be done

about it, and we certainly could not afford to run any longer at the high revolutions.

Darkness had come upon us, our binnacle light refused to burn for more than a few minutes at a time, and a choppy sea had got up.

Under these circumstances we again filled our tank—or rather, put some petrol in it—and restarted the engine. If we carried on at the reduced speed, and our petrol lasted out, we would make Bangor while it was yet dark. This I did not wish to do; also I greatly doubted whether the petrol would last out the distance.

We knew that the boat would lie hove-to comfortably enough. A strong fair tide was running, and therefore we decided to run to a position whence the tide would carry us to a point a mile off the Great Orme's Head, and there stop our engine.

Just before two o'clock in the morning we stopped the engine. At six we had the Orme's Head light abeam, daylight was breaking, so once more we started up, and reached Bangor at eight, with nearly a couple of gallons of petrol in hand.

On arrival at Bangor we found frantic telegrams from the owner of *Foam*, asking for news of us. It appeared, subsequently, that he watched our departure that Sunday afternoon, keeping powerful glasses upon us. The last thing that he saw was his boat striking a wave and being enveloped in a smother of foam. He failed to sight her afterwards, and feared that she had foundered. We certainly had been splashing the water about to some tune at that particular time, and quite possibly, from a distance and through glasses, the foam which we threw up, owing to its whiteness, may have completely filled his field of vision, so that the small grey-painted hull of *Foam* would escape observation in the general smother which surrounded her.

CHAPTER XXV

A TRIP TO IRELAND

WHEN my friend and I returned to the Mersey, after completing our trip to Bangor, we were interested to find a larger, and completely decked, motor launch lying in the Liverpool docks, waiting for suitable weather in which to cross over to Ireland. Her owners seemed surprised when we informed them how we had been passing the week-end.

"If," said we, "you should still be here next Saturday, we would be very pleased to join you for your passage to Ireland."

"While we should be very pleased to have you with us, should we not have left by then, we fear that it will not be possible, as we expect to get away to-morrow," the Irish owner replied.

When Friday evening came the Irishman was still tied up in dock, so we approached him once more, and inquired whether he was still willing that we should accompany him next day.

He expressed great pleasure at the prospect of having us with him, and it was accordingly arranged that we should join the ship in dock before tide time on the Saturday morning.

Saturday morning came in with a flat calm and dense fog, but we duly turned up at Princes Dock about an hour before the gates were to open. To our surprise, on boarding the Irishman we found nobody stirring—indeed, the only sign of life to be noticed was a series of loud snores, coming from somewhere below deck.

Not for long did this state of things continue. We started to clump about on deck and to drop coils of rope in places under which we estimated the sleepers might be lying. Soon our efforts to awake the slumbering crew were rewarded, and out from various hatches popped sleepy head after sleepy head.

"What's to do?" they inquired, while looking round in a semi-dazed condition, not yet fully awake.

"We're here to take you to sea, as promised," we informed them, "and you had better hurry turning out, as it is nearly tide time."

Down ducked the heads, remarking as they went, "Och! is that it?"

Evidently the news that the vessel was to proceed to sea was too much for one of the crew, as within a couple of minutes he made his appearance on deck, still half asleep, and with his clothes thrown on any old how. In his hand he grasped a leather bag. Taking a hurried look round, he bolted, with his bag, for the steps leading up the dock wall, and in less time than it takes to tell he was to be seen scuttling away at his best pace, headed for town. So much for him; we did not see him again.

Meanwhile, the rest of the crew made ready for sea and started the engine. All being in readiness, and the gates about to open, I was approached by the owner.

"There you are, she's all ready for you," said he.

"Dash it all," I exclaimed, "you don't expect me to supersede you by taking charge of your ship. She is strange to me, whereas you know her."

"And why not?" he inquired.

"Very well," said I, seeing that there was no help for it, but not altogether relishing the job.

With that, I entered the wheelhouse, and, ordering our ropes to be cast off, we were soon under way and passing out through the dock gates into a wall of fog.

The vessel had never been swung so that her compass might be adjusted, and her owner was quite unable to tell me anything about its deviation, or whether it, in fact, had any, so I just had to trust to luck. Before losing sight of the dock wall I put the vessel parallel to it, and noted the direction of her head by compass. From this I was pleased to observe that she had at any rate no apparent deviation on a northerly course, and with this I had to be satisfied for the time being.

It was anxious work for me, poking through the fog on our way down river, but we managed to get clear of the channels without any untoward incident.

Once outside, a breeze sprang up and the fog lifted, enabling us to see the land and other marks. Again I was fortunate enough to get a check on the compass when steering west; the result was the same as before—no apparent deviation.

About this time the owner's wife announced that breakfast was ready, and the news came as a pleasant surprise. I had quite forgotten the question of food, in the hurry of our departure, but fortunately the lady had not. While we had been poking our way through the fog in the river she had been busy below preparing breakfast, instead of worrying whether we would get into collision or not, as many people would have done under the same circumstances.

Handing the wheel over to the owner, I joined the rest of the party at one of the best breakfasts which it has ever been my good fortune to eat when afloat for pleasure.

After breakfast the general outlook became much more cheering. The sun came out and the breeze freshened. Providentially, the wind was off the land, but as we were some distance off shore, the old hooker began to roll a little—nothing to matter, just sufficient to make it clear that we were actually at sea. Two hours out the crew's feelings got the better of them, and one after another they became

less and less talkative, until at last ominous sounds were to be heard on all sides.

The owner's wife was not affected, nor was the owner or his chief assistant, and my mate was untroubled; but the others were very unhappy.

As far as Point Lynas, on the north-east corner of Anglesey, everything went well, but as we brought the lighthouse abeam, our engine started to cough and splutter. Sometimes I thought it would stop entirely, but it just kept going.

Passing along the northern coast of Anglesey, the engine was running far from well, but showed no immediate signs of stopping. Progressing further west, the tide turned against us, and to dodge the strength of it I edged close inshore among the rocks and islands. Some brilliant lad from amongst those below deemed this a suitable opportunity for trying to sort out the troubles from which the engine was suffering. In the wheelhouse I soon knew, from the behaviour of the engine, that someone was monkeying with it, and forthwith despatched a messenger to the engine-room to request, with due emphasis, that the dashed thing be left alone until we were at least in more open waters.

This message had the desired effect, and we won through past that island, which is known as the West Mouse, without our engine stopping entirely, though there were moments of hesitation when it seemed for all the world as though it were about to pack up for good.

As we opened Holyhead Bay, beyond the West Mouse, we met the full force of the wind, which was by now blowing very strongly indeed, and, together with the tide, was kicking up a considerable sea. Heavy rain squalls drove down upon us, and to the south and west the whole sky was black as ink. Under this blackness, to seaward, the foam-capped crests of racing waves showed white and menacing.

Hastily, before it was shut in by the rain and gathering gloom, I took a bearing of the lighthouse which stands on

the extreme end of the Holyhead breakwater. The look of the weather did not attract me, and I had fully made up my mind that we would spend that night in the refuge harbour at Holyhead, instead of continuing through the hours of darkness with a badly running engine and a seasick crew.

However, I headed the ship away on her course for Dublin.

By now Holyhead was lost to view, and even all signs of the land itself were blotted out. Behind me in the wheelhouse I heard the voice of the owner. "And phwat do ye think of ut?" it said.

"Think of what?" I inquired quite innocently, and without turning my head.

"Of the weather, for sure."

"I don't think of the weather. It won't bear thinking of."

"Well, the crew are very sick, and the engine's running rotten," he continued.

"Do you mean that you want to put into Holyhead for the night, instead of going on through this bit of a splather?" I asked.

"Just that," he answered, eagerly. "But can you find Holyhead?"

"And why not?" said I, feigning surprise that he should doubt it, at the same time altering course for the breakwater end.

"The weather's so thick that there's no land to be seen," he replied. "An' where will Holyhead be?"

"In about five minutes, if you look out of the starboard window of the wheelhouse, you should see the breakwater light nearly over your head," I told him.

Quite evidently unbelieving, after five minutes had expired he duly looked out as instructed.

"Bedad! She's there!" he ejaculated, in utter astonishment.

Though the weather was certainly thick, and the night had

closed in so that all was dark, we crept into the harbour, and finding a suitable vacant berth, we moored ship without accident. Then all turned in for the night.

About five in the morning I roused out all hands to get ready for sea, and hauled in one anchor, afterwards heaving short on the other. Meanwhile, the engine was carefully looked over and breakfast was prepared. Not knowing how much sea there might be outside, though the morning seemed fine from within the harbour, we decided that breakfast should be eaten and cleared away before we weighed our second anchor.

This arrangement having been carried through, we finally got away about seven o'clock.

Outside the harbour we found a fresh northerly breeze and a small choppy sea, through which we punched quite comfortably. As we cleared the bay and left the land astern a considerable swell rolling up from the south-west made its presence felt, evidently the aftermath of the south-west wind which had been blowing the previous evening. The result of the northerly wind across the south-westerly swell was a peculiarly uneasy sea, which caused our little vessel to roll and plunge, but, being a good little sea boat, she worried about it not at all.

This morning her engine had started as though it had not a care in the world, but before we had left the harbour five miles behind us, yesterday's troubles returned. Slight at first, the symptoms grew gradually worse, until they finally culminated in a complete stoppage of the engine when we had made an offing of about fifteen miles from the nearest land.

Here was my opportunity to see how the boat would behave when hove-to. Putting the helm hard up, I leaned my back against the wheel to keep the rudder steady, and proceeded to fill my pipe while watching how the little

vessel rode the waves. Though she rolled considerably at times, owing to the cross-running sea, on the whole she lay fairly comfortably almost beam on to the wind.

To me came the owner's wife, alarm depicted on her countenance. "What has happened? Has the engine broken down? Oh! I hope it is nothing serious, we are so far from the land," she exclaimed, not giving me time to answer one question before she asked the next.

"I don't know whether the engine has broken down or not, but I expect it has only stopped for some easily-explained reason," I replied, while proceeding with the filling and lighting of my pipe. "It has been unhappy most of the morning, so we might just as well sort it out now. Having a good offing from the land, as you have pointed out, we shall be quite all right; even should the engine refuse to start for a week or so, we cannot very well hit anything in the interval. Why worry?"

My casual way of looking at the matter seemed to comfort her a good deal, and evidently thinking that there could be no real danger while I was so completely unperturbed, she retired whence she came, like the sensible woman she undoubtedly was. Actually, she was the best sailor of the whole of that crowd, and had it not been for her unaided efforts we should have fared badly with regard to meals. As it was, wherever we were, and whatever the weather conditions might be, meals always made their appearance with a truly surprising regularity, most unusual in small pleasure boats.

When the engine stopped I put it to the owner that he should allow my mate to sort it out, and to this suggestion he gladly agreed. Within about twenty minutes the engine was once more running at about half power, while before forty had passed we were plugging along faster than we had been able to manage any time since leaving the Mersey.

As the engine came to life, so the weather improved, the swell died down and the breeze eased off, while the sun shone brilliantly. Half-way over to the Irish land the day became ideal: barely a ripple on the water, and the temperature just high enough to be pleasant.

Observing the surrounding atmosphere casually, one would have ventured the opinion that visibility extended at least fifteen miles, but this was not the case. Actually, the limit of vision was little more than four. I suspected this condition of affairs; not so the Irish crew.

When at length the troubles with the engine had been got over, and all was proceeding smoothly, they began to fuss about the course which I was steering, suggesting that they would have expected me to steer so and so, as that was the course given in the railway guide, or some other publication equally useless for purposes of navigation. True, we had lain stopped for some time; also the tides were strong, and our leeway, due to the northerly wind, had to be allowed for, so the setting of a course was not such plain sailing as some people might suppose it to be.

They sighted a steamer broad off on the starboard bow, heading north, and assured me that she was bound for Dublin. Soon after they saw a schooner running southwest, and asserted with certainty that she was making for the Liffey. On each occasion they seemed surprised that I did not immediately alter course in pursuit of these various vessels.

The "Kish" Lightship lies moored off the entrance to the Liffey, and she is the first mark likely to be picked up when approaching Dublin from the direction of Holyhead. Time was going on, and by dead reckoning, which was confirmed by the reading of the patent log that had been towing astern since leaving the breakwater in the morning, we should be within five miles of the lightship, but there was

nothing to be seen. The only explanation which occurred to me was that the visibility must be much poorer than it appeared.

Anxiously, but without betraying my anxiety, I kept a very sharp look-out, and within ten minutes was fortunate enough to sight, very slightly on our starboard bow, a dim shape bearing a strong resemblance to the light vessel which we were seeking. Heading straight for the lightship, I called to the owner, and asked him to take the glasses and see if he could pick up the Kish, adding that, by calculation, we should be within three miles of it.

"And where do you expect her to be?" he inquired.

"Where else than ahead," I replied.

The owner then swept—what he took to be—the distant horizon with his glasses, looking first to port, then to starboard. At last, seeing nothing in either direction, he adopted my suggestion, and looked ahead.

"I see something," he exclaimed.

"Where away?" I inquired.

"Right ahead," said he.

"What does it look like?" was my next inquiry.

"The 'Kish' Lightship!" he shouted, excitedly. "It's herself. I can see her quite plain."

In a quarter of an hour we passed the lightship, and I then handed over charge to our owner, so that he might himself take his vessel into Kingstown, whither we were bound.

At his request, when we entered the harbour I again took charge until we had picked up a mooring and made all secure.

For the latter part of the passage the engine never faltered, and so ended a very pleasant trip, with that happy feeling that all was well with the ship.

CHAPTER XXVI

YAWL TO CUTTER

POWER boating, though pleasant enough in its way, is apt to lack incident when compared with sail, so, though I could get plenty of trips in power boats, I always preferred *Iomhar*.

Her yawl rig was becoming played out; something, therefore, had to be done. As a yawl she was very handy for cruising, but when racing under that rig her performance was poor. Therefore in 1924, when new sails had to be bought, she was altered from yawl to cutter, so that she might improve her racing record.

Rigged as a cutter, her mainboom exceeds thirty feet in length, and projects beyond her extreme stern, thus making it a difficult matter to reef the sail when a reduction of canvas becomes necessary. Under these circumstances, the mainsail is seldom set except when racing. For passage making a trysail with a loose foot is used, and the mainsail remains stowed on its boom, which lies on the gallows.

The trysail is only small, and for quite a long time we thought that, no matter how hard the wind might blow, it would never be necessary for that sail to be reefed, but in this we were wrong.

Returning from the Straits Regattas one August day in 1924, the wind, when we got under weigh, was very light, but as the glass was falling, we were content to start out under trysail and staysail only. On our way down the Straits, a friend, who was also about to return to the Mersey, hailed us to say that he hoped the wind would not fall any lighter, otherwise our return passage would be a weary one indeed.

"Don't worry," we told him. "You will have plenty of wind before you are through."

We expected a breeze, but did not in the least suspect what we were in for!

Once clear of the Straits the wind came away in hard puffs from the south-east, a dead head wind for us. Soon the puffs joined together into a strong blow, and the sea got up very rapidly. Tide flowing against the wind made the waves remarkably awkward to deal with, and we experienced a punishing time beating to windward round the Great Orme's Head.

Another boat, also bound for the Mersey, followed us part of the way, but off the Head she gave up the struggle and ran for shelter into the Conway River. Of our other friend who had spoken us on the way out, and who had hoped that the wind would not fall any lighter, we saw nothing.

Plugging away to windward, soaked through with spray, crashing through and over the waves, slowly we made progress, while the wind blew harder and harder. At last, when the flood tide was about finished, and we were within about five miles of the entrance to the Mersey, we decided that to attempt to continue carrying the whole trysail would be merely foolish, so, watching our opportunity, we threw *Iomhar* head to wind and lowered it down on deck. Though the operation sounds simple, it was not so easy. There were only three of us on board that trip—"Filth," who was mate, myself, and one young and rather green hand, called "Spadger" because his name was Swan, who was seasick, besides being not a little frightened, as it was his first trip outside the river. Under such weather conditions I dared not allow anyone of whose seaworthiness I was not absolutely certain to attempt to come on deck, and this ruled out the green hand for anything except pulling on ropes from the security of the cockpit.

I handled the ship, and this left only the mate to carry

out the rest of the work, but he managed to get the trysail off her while I kept her dodging along under the staysail, practically hove-to. In this trim we rode for perhaps half an hour, while the wind blew so hard that no more sail could well be carried.

Then there were signs that the wind was taking off, and at the same time the sun showed up—its first appearance that day. Our wet clothes began to steam, and prospects became much more cheerful, though it was still blowing too hard for us to attempt to set our whole trysail.

“‘Filth,’” said I, “she would carry a close-reefed trysail, so you had better get the reefs tied down.”

Looking at me as though I had asked him to undertake a sheer impossibility, grudgingly he said, “I’ll try, if you like.”

“Try. There is no difficulty about it!”

I have always found it well to make light of difficulties, in order to inspire confidence, and, as usual, on this occasion the scheme worked. The mate, without further protest, close reefed that trysail, practically single-handed, and subsequently set it.

Under close-reefed trysail and staysail, pressed down so that the whole of our lee deck was most of the time submerged, we tore through a strong foul tide, and eventually reached our moorings up the River Mersey without further excitement.

Our friend who had hailed us in the Straits did not arrive home that night, and we afterwards heard that he had boarded one of the lightships off the port, who had given him sanctuary, and that he had been dismasted. Another small yacht struck on one of the outer banks in the bay, and her crew were rescued by a local lifeboat. Certainly we did not lack wind that day.

Talking of making light of difficulties in order to encourage the crew reminds me of an incident which happened once while we were racing on the Mersey in 1925. During



“FILTH” AND “THE CHILD.”

that race, while running down wind, our topsail sheet carried away, so that the topsail was left flapping about round the mast. It was the work of but a few moments to send a hand aloft to clear the topsail and then to lower it down on deck. We were being closely followed by one of our competitors, and could not, therefore, afford the necessary time to lower the mainsail so that a new sheet could be rove through the sheave, which is situated at the extreme outboard end of the gaff. Nor could we afford to be without our topsail for the rest of the race.

"Who is going out along that gaff to reeve off a new sheet?" I inquired.

No rush of volunteers for the job, though some of the crew said that they would not attempt it for anybody.

"Right," said I, after a suitable pause. "One of you come and take the helm, while I go and reeve the sheet myself."

That did it. Up spoke the mate.

"No, Skipper, you won't," said he. "I'll go and reeve it off."

Robert also offered to do the job, but was firmly refused.

"Filth" was as good as his word. Up the mast he climbed, groggy leg and all, until he reached the crosstrees, then outwards and upwards he crawled along that swaying gaff with the end of a new sheet tucked into his belt, holding on for the first part of the way by the peak halliards as best he might, and afterwards balancing himself with a leg each side of the sail. I did my level best to keep the sail quiet while he was aloft, but my heart was in my mouth lest he should lose his balance and fall.

At last, after what seemed an age, but a period which cannot have exceeded three minutes in all, I saw him reeve the new sheet successfully and return to the deck in safety, following one of the finest efforts that I have ever seen performed.

CHAPTER XXVII

AN UNUSUAL COMMAND

My liking for strange trips has, in the course of years, become fairly well known to my friends, and one of these, having recently bought an old steam yacht where she lay near Lancaster, asked me to take her round to Bangor on his behalf.

It appeared that she was a twin-screw vessel, which had been lying up in the same spot for about six years, and the condition of her boiler was unknown. My friend arranged to send an engineer to the ship and I was to collect an amateur crew, and to join with them on hearing from the engineer that the ship was ready for sea.

When we received the promised message, we made our way by train to the port where the vessel was lying, and were met at the station on our arrival by the engineer.

He reported that he had had the boiler under steam, and that he had tried the engines. Except that one boiler tube had burst, necessitating the fitting of a stopper, he had experienced no special troubles, and the vessel was now ready for sea. But, and this was rather a large but, the Dock Authorities would not allow her to proceed until they received instructions from London authorising them to do so, the reason being that there might be unsatisfied claims against her incurred by her late owners. This was an unfortunate situation, but it could not be helped.

We called on the Authorities, and urged the importance of the ship getting away without delay. We threatened to

hold them responsible for the cost of any coal which we burned while keeping steam to await sailing, also the cost of crew's wages and maintenance would be for their account. We wrote out long telegrams, and sent them off in all directions, but still we lacked the necessary permission to depart.

That first day it rained, and the decks and cabins of the old boat leaked ; the general condition below was musty and damp, but we made the best of it. There was no cutlery or crockery on board, and none was to be obtained in the little hole-and-corner spot where we found ourselves located, so we made arrangements to feed at the local inn until such time as we should be allowed to leave. There we fed in the kitchen, while fowls and chickens walked in and out through the open doors seeking any scraps which might be dropped in the course of the meal. Truly it was a homely scene, but we would rather have been at sea.

Next morning opened fine, with brilliant sunshine—a glorious day for passage-making in steam, but tide time came and went while still we awaited permission to proceed—this in spite of having offered to pay any charges which might be owing by the ship.

That afternoon I was sitting on a bollard on the quay alongside the ship, placidly smoking my pipe and enjoying the sun, for there was nothing better to do. Close by, the steam fizzled and spluttered gently and soothingly in the boiler, which was under banked fires, keeping warm in readiness for our departure. The flies buzzed round, and the boiler sizzled so peacefully that I was on the point of dropping off to sleep, when suddenly there was a “Wumph !” from somewhere deep down in the bowels of the ship, followed by a little cloud of steam spreading like a sun-shade above the top of the funnel.

Wide awake now, I turned to one of the crew who happened to be near.

"Where is the Chief?" I inquired.

"Down below in the cabin, writing a letter to his wife," was the reply.

"Slip down and tell him that his bally kettle has burst, there's a good chap," said I.

In a few moments up rushed the Chief. "What's this about the boiler?" he demanded.

"She's bust," I told him. "Probably another of your rotten tubes gone west. Look at the steam over the funnel, if you doubt me."

Diving down the engine-room ladder, the Chief soon found that what I had told him was only too true. A tube had burst, and water was pouring out of the boiler on to the stokehold plates.

"Just as well, on the whole, that we did not get to sea this morning," I comforted him. "It will be quite a lot easier to fit a tube stopper while tied up here, than would have been the case had the tube burst while we were miles out at sea."

He drew the fires and blew the boiler down to below the level of the defective tube while he still had steam with which to perform the operation. It was now about four o'clock in the afternoon, and the next daylight tide would be about ten the following morning. Should we receive our permission to proceed in the interval, we should have to start moving out of the berth not later than nine, in order to be ready when the gates opened to meet the tide.

While discussing what we would do in the matter of repairs, a messenger on a bicycle arrived from the Dock Authorities to say that we were free to go as soon as we liked, and that there were no charges against the ship.

Could we be ready to leave next morning? That was

the question. The boiler had to be allowed to cool off sufficiently to permit someone to go up the back end and fix the tube stopper, after which the boiler must be filled with water. No hydrant or hose was available, and there was no hand pump on board which could be used for the purpose. Therefore the only alternative would be for us to knock in the top manhole door, and to fill the boiler through this by means of buckets, drawing water from overside.

Talking the matter over with the Chief, I asked him when he expected the boiler would be sufficiently cool to enable him to fix the stopper.

"Between three and four in the morning," he replied.

This would make it impossible for us to have the boiler filled and steam raised to catch the morning's tide. I made no comment at the time, but temporarily changed the subject.

Later, while we were all sitting chatting after tea, I worked the conversation round to the subject of boiler defects, telling some of my amateur experiences and making remarks thereon.

"I remember," said I, "a time when the Chief of a ship that I happened to be in asked me to go up the port furnace of a boiler in which the starboard fire was still lit, and when fifty pounds of steam was being carried. The port fire had only just been drawn. Being young at the time, I naturally regarded the feat as impossible, but the Chief said that it would be quite all right, and that he would go in as well. Putting wet sacks round our hands and knees, we crawled up the furnace, and examined a leak which had broken out in the back end. The sensations which I experienced were certainly strange, but the draught of cold air drawn in through the furnace mouth, ashpit and funnel dampers all being open, made the tem-

perature quite bearable. True, one leg of my dungarees had a large hole burned in it before I once more got out into the stokehold, but otherwise the visit to that back end proved a complete success, besides being most interesting."

That tale I told him, as well as several others in much the same strain. These stories may or may not have influenced the Chief; I don't know. But when nine o'clock came, just seven hours before he estimated that the furnace would be cool enough for work, he remarked, "I think we might have a shot at fitting that tube stopper."

Up the furnace he went without further delay, and fitted the stopper, though he nearly expired several times during the process. Throughout we kept a hand or two closely in touch with him, and asking constant questions, so that should he faint, and fail to answer, he could be hauled out into the open air before he should suffer any real harm.

By midnight the work was finished, the boiler filled and closed up, and the fires away. Then I sent the Chief to bed, as he thoroughly deserved a rest, and myself tended the fires as they required it during the night.

No further trouble was experienced with the boiler tubes, and when the Chief made his appearance, soon after seven, steam was showing and all was in readiness for him to start warming his engines.

The morning was calm, and, when the time arrived, we got out of dock without any special difficulty.

When looking round the ship on the previous day, we had been rather exercised in our minds to observe that the ship's steering compass was missing, though the binnacle and compensating magnets were in place. Hunting about down below, we had discovered a compass in one of the after cabins, which, though much smaller than the proper steering compass, might be made to answer the purpose.

Accordingly, we slung this small compass inside the steering binnacle, being careful to hang it with its card as near to the level of the card of the missing compass as possible—this with the object of attempting to bring it, as nearly as we could, subject to the same attractions and compensations as the original compass. Whether this would be successful or not we had no means of judging, as we did not get a chance to swing the ship before leaving. Therefore we hoped that we should experience clear weather.

A local man came aboard prior to our leaving, and to him we showed our chart of the Lancaster river, asking him whether the buoys shown upon it were approximately in their present positions. He assured us that they were correct as shown.

Once outside the dock gates, the weather began to thicken, and for the first three miles we were only just able to pick up the navigation marks bounding the river. Afterwards it became so thick that we were driven to depend on compass courses for picking up the various buoys denoting the channels of the estuary. Once we got a chance to sight the leading marks when they were in line, and found that our temporary compass was correct to a degree on that particular course. This gave me more confidence during what was to come than I should otherwise have had.

Not once did we find a buoy in the position where we expected it to be, in the whole of our run down that estuary. Setting courses from buoy to buoy, and being careful to identify each one, we chased about all over the place. Never did we make a buoy right ahead; always they turned up broad off to port or starboard. However, at long last we got clear of the estuary, without having missed a single buoy.

Our troubles were not yet over. The weather still remained thick. Taking a departure from the outermost of the buoys in the Lancaster estuary, we set a course to carry us just clear of the Fleetwood fairway buoy, and then settled down to hope for the best. For the first time that day Fortune really favoured us. We picked up the fairway buoy exactly where and when we had expected it, and as it came abeam there was a temporary clearance of the fog, which enabled us to get the buoy in transit with the Wyre light. Thus we obtained a valuable bearing, which made it possible for us to ascertain the approximate deviation of the compass for the particular heading on which we should be while running down to the Lune Ship, and until we were clear of the Rossall Patch buoys.

As we got down to the Lune Ship the weather cleared, and we saw both the Lune Ship and the outer Patch buoy. With the clearing of the fog a nice westerly breeze filled in, and this soon converted what had been a dull and threatening morning into a perfectly fine day, blue sky overhead, and just sufficient lop of sea to let the old hooker know that she had at last finished that long lie up, which must have seemed to her to have been almost interminable in its boredom.

Out in the clear weather I became conscious, for the first time, of the fact that my feet were thoroughly roasted. The floor of the wheelhouse was close to the top of the boiler, and the heat was intense, while I had been standing upon it for over two hours. Calling "Spadger" to the wheel, I remarked that I supposed him to be capable of steering a compass course, and on his answering in the affirmative I gave him the course, and retired to the maindeck to cool my feet, which were fast becoming painful.

On deck, sitting enjoying the fine weather, I suddenly became aware of the fact that a schooner which had been

visible broad off on the port bow, and distant about five miles, when I had relinquished the wheel, had mysteriously disappeared from view. Getting up and taking a look round, I discovered my old friend the schooner broad off to starboard. Back I went to the wheelhouse, to interview our helmsman.

“ Thought you said you could steer by compass ? ”

“ So I can,” “ Spadger ” replied.

“ But,” I countered, “ you are now four points off your course.”

This seemed to surprise him considerably ; however, he did not argue about it, and I spent the next half hour in teaching him to steer, after which he really got along very well. Meanwhile the rest of my friends and crew, to the number of two, of whom Robert was one, were hauling up and dumping ashes from the stokehold for the Engineer. This was quite an education for them, as, though they appreciated that the little ship was coal-fired, the problem of the disposal of ashes had not previously occurred to their minds. By the time we finished that trip they fully understood that the getting up of ashes formed a considerable proportion of the daily duty of those who go to sea in steam ships.

In the intervals of ash raising, one of them would relieve the Engineer and do a bit of firing, while the other fried eggs and bacon and made tea.

Pots and pans we had, of a sort ; also a plate or two, one teaspoon, and a long carving-knife and fork were discovered. There were two teacups—one without a handle—and several ex-jam jars which did duty for cups.

The eggs and bacon were manipulated with fingers, pocket knives and steel rules, to the best of our ability, but it proved a messy business. The carving-knife was used for cutting the bread and spreading the butter, while

the carving-fork was commandeered by the cook for fishing out the bacon when well and truly fried.

The solitary teaspoon passed from hand to hand as required ; but a mystery attaches to that teaspoon. When off the Great Orme's Head, tea being handed round for about the sixth time that day, the services of the teaspoon were in request, but no teaspoon was forthcoming. All hands were interrogated, and a careful search was made, but without result. That teaspoon had gone from us, quietly and without fuss ; no one had seen it go, but gone it undoubtedly had.

After recriminations, by general verdict of the meeting gathered together it was agreed that the spoon must have been driven to suicide through overwork, and have slipped gently overboard when no one was watching or able to put out a hand to stay it. Anyway, we never saw our spoon again, and it was sadly missed during the remainder of the passage.

Arriving in the Straits towards dusk that night, the wind started to blow strongly from the south-west. But what cared we, as by now we were well under the shelter of the land ?

Our instructions had been to put the ship alongside a wall at Bangor at high water, where she would lie safely tied up in a mud berth until her owner wished to move her.

On our arrival off Bangor the tide was right, and we proceeded to head straight in for the allotted berth. When almost alongside, and heading up into a strong wind, we were hailed from the shore with shouts of " Keep off ! Keep off ! "

It was then nearly dark, and not knowing the reason for the shouts, to be on the safe side we stopped both engines. Immediately we did so the ship lost way, and

her head began to pay off before the wind. Almost at once came another hail from the shore :

“ All right, sir. Come ahead.”

My remarks then could not possibly be repeated. Our bow was falling away before the wind, and I could not get the ship headed up again without taking a complete round turn out of her. This, in my innocence, I proceeded to do. Once more heading towards the berth, we kept good way on, pointed end on to the wind, so as to retain steerage control. It was getting so dark that from the wheelhouse I could not clearly see the bowsprit end, so I rang for astern on the starboard engine, and at the same time hailed the foredeck to ask how far away we were.

“ About your own length,” was the reply from Bob.

Even with my own limited vision I could see that our bowsprit was getting very close to the wall. Again my remarks were such as I should not care to reproduce, but they had the desired effect. Quickly came back a call from forward, estimating the distance from the wall at about four feet. His previous reply referred to our distance from being in berth, not the space between our bowsprit and the wall.

Once more I rang for full astern on the starboard engine, and supplemented the telegraph by shouting down the engine-room skylight a lurid request that the starboard engine would go astern before Christmas, or otherwise we should lose our bowsprit against the wall. Back as it were from the beyond, filtered up to me the plaintive voice of the Engineer :

“ She’s stuck, I can’t get her to move ; and, anyway, I haven’t got any steam.”

Very comforting to me, but just then, as though to give him the lie direct, she evidently became unstuck, for she

fell over the centres and padded away astern as though Old Nick himself were after her. That saved our bowsprit, and we landed into our berth beautifully gently without further incident, thus successfully concluding an interesting trip.

Apparently the Engineer, knowing that we were approaching berth, had allowed his fires to burn down, though still keeping a full head of steam by regulating his stop valves. This would have turned out all right but for that ass on shore who hailed us to keep off. The steam which I used in making the subsequent necessary complete round turn ran down the pressure much below that intended by the Engineer, hence the difficulty he experienced in inducing the starboard engine to reverse.

People watching men in charge of ships seldom appreciate that the skipper does not always get what he rings for. Therefore they are apt to criticise adversely his handling of the ship, when if they knew more of the circumstances they would realise that the error is not his, but rather that it is a happening due to some matter over which he has no control. Steam teaches a man that he is very dependent on other men, and that he cannot do everything himself.

CHAPTER XXVIII

A WILD NIGHT

To some extent the same thing might be said of sail, but somehow there is one outstanding difference between a sailing-boat and a steamer. The sailing-boat can, under certain circumstances, look after herself in a way quite beyond the power of any steamer.

There was an occasion when we were due to race with *Iomhar* from Fleetwood to Ramsey, on a Saturday immediately before Whitsuntide, 1925. The crew, being only amateur sailors, were unable to leave their ordinary employment before the Friday evening, and they must, without exception, be back at their offices in Liverpool by the first thing on Tuesday morning. Under these circumstances, we were unable to leave the Mersey before the Friday evening's tide, and when that time arrived the weather proved to be anything but good.

A fresh south-west wind was blowing, and the general outlook was dirty. We got away on the top of the tide, snugged down under a trysail and staysail, and went along quite comfortably until we were almost off Blackpool, when, from the gathering swell, it became evident that a strong blow was in store for us. From then onward wind and sea increased, also heavy rain set in, making us very uncomfortable. This latter particularly applies to the crew, of whom there were three—"Filth" the mate, "Spadger" previously mentioned, and "The Child," younger brother of the mate. These three were all sick before we made the Lune Ship.

Approaching Fleetwood, the wind backed round to south-east, which gave us smoother water, as it was off the land.

Arrived off the Wyre light at the entrance to Fleetwood, we lowered the trysail, for it was then blowing very hard indeed, and tried to work in, under staysail only, to find an anchorage for the night. The wind blew harder and harder out of Fleetwood, and I dared not attempt to beat up the narrow channel in the dark.

Under these circumstances, we regretfully decided that we would lie off and on outside, always supposing that we could manage it, until daylight should make it possible to enter the port. The only alternative would have been to run for shelter into the mouth of the river Lune; this we did not wish to do, if we could possibly avoid it, on account of the risk of collision with one or other of the unlighted buoys around its mouth.

Iomhar did not lie-to comfortably under her staysail, so we tied down the tack of the trysail and sheeted it from the upper cringle, thus roughly reducing its area, the night being too dark to pass the lacing and reef it properly under such weather conditions.

When this reduced trysail was set, we found that the little vessel had more sail than she rightly knew what to do with, and that she was splashing the water about to an unpleasant extent. Purely as an experiment, we lowered the staysail, to see what she would do under the reduced trysail alone. To our great relief, she seemed to like it. Though the waves were large, with foaming crests, she rode over them all like a little duck, never taking a drop of water on her deck.

At first I thought that her behaviour was partly due to my helmsmanship, as I had been expending much effort in nursing her over each successive wave, but at length I

became wearied of my labour, and bethought me to try what she would do if left to herself with her helm lashed partly alee.

Carefully I watched her, ready at any moment to jump in and take a hand should she get out of position, or any particularly awkward sea appear about to fall on board. Though many times my hand approached that tiller, I did not touch it, and over each sea, as it came along, she rode buoyant as a cork.

Observing her situation by frequent bearings, we saw that she was working across the Heysham Channel, and at the same time being slowly, ever so slowly, carried to leeward by the flood tide. When she had worked over as far to the westward as we dared allow her to go on the port tack, the wind having in the meantime veered to about south, it became necessary to get her round, so that she would work back to the eastward.

Would she stay? We did not know; we could but try. Taking the tiller in hand, I let her fall off a little, so that she gathered good headway. Then, watching until a specially large roller had just passed underneath her, I put the helm hard down. Up, and further up, into the wind she swung, and I thought that she would come right round, but just as she was almost head to wind a vicious sea hit her on her devoted nose, and pushed her back whence she came, while quantities of water swept her foredeck. Twice we attempted to stay, each time with the same result.

The matter was becoming urgent; we must get her round somehow, or she would be in danger of driving ashore on the menacing sands now so close under her lee. There was still just room to wear ship, but dare we attempt it? Full well we knew the risks involved. At one point in the operation of wearing she would be lying beam on to the waves, right in the trough of the sea. If, when she reached

that particular position, a wave should break close to windward, the results would be unpleasant; we would be swept by the water, even should nothing worse come of it.

She would not stay, so, risks notwithstanding, we must attempt to wear. Gradually putting the helm up, we got her going fast through the water, and then, watching for a chance, put the helm up sharply, so that she payed off before the wind. Allowing her a moment or two in which to gather maximum way down wind, we gybed the trysail and brought the wind on her quarter. Again watching our chance, we slapped the helm hard down and brought her head to wind, thus having her nearly stopped before she met the next roaring avalanche. This wave having passed, we let her fall off on to the starboard tack, to resume her slow passage back to the opposite side of the channel. The whole operation had been performed without her having wet her decks. Lashing the helm slightly alee, I then went below for a comfortable smoke and to observe the condition of my crew, while leaving her to carry on the good work alone.

With the exception of coming on deck for a look round and to observe our position from time to time, I spent most of the remainder of that night below with the crew. About every half-hour or so we would reach what I considered the safe limits of the channel, and then I repeated the operation of wearing ship. Not once was a sheet started, and not once did I experience the slightest difficulty in getting her safely round. To me that night was an education in itself—I had previously had no idea that a packet such as ours could be handled in this way, and she proved definitely that, left to herself she made better weather of it untended than she did with a helmsman at the tiller.

Quietly and persistently she worked to windward throughout the night, so that, in spite of the strong lee-going tide,

she lost less than three miles of ground in six hours. The crew were certainly by no means happy all the time, but the experiences of that night made quite fair sailors of them. Now they don't care a rap what may befall in the way of weather while they are out in *Iomhar*, and I agree with them.

When daylight came the tide was on the turn, so we let the old hooker tramp along a bit on her way to Fleetwood. The tide running against the wind made an even nastier sea, but what cared we? Even if a splash or two of water did come on board, the little vessel had proved herself.

We got into Fleetwood, only to find that the race to Ramsay had been postponed on account of the storm.

Two nights we lay in Fleetwood, waiting for the weather to moderate, and still the race did not start, so when Monday morning came we cleared out for Liverpool, again under close-reefed trysail and staysail. It was a hard thrash to windward the whole way to the Bar, but we safely reached our moorings up the Sloyne the same afternoon, in plenty of time for the crew to get cleaned up for the office by Tuesday morning, as arranged.

Fleetwood does not strike one as being a likely place in which to find adventure, but appearances are deceptive sometimes.

At Whitsuntide, 1926, we approached the place at our usual hour, about midnight, and this time the water was smooth and the wind was light, so we decided to enter. Even should we miss the channel and get stuck, no great harm would be done. Sure enough, when about half-way in, we did miss the channel, and stuck hard and fast. It was nearly low water at the time, so we just remained where we were until the flood tide made sufficiently to float us.

Meanwhile the wind had dropped away to nothing, so that when we floated we were unable to make use of our sails.

Nothing for it but to kedge up on the tide, and this we proceeded to do, finally passing into the port stern first; undignified, perhaps, but quite effective.

When nearly in we got a compass bearing of the anchorage to which we were bound, and then, without warning, a dense fog closed in around us, shutting out all sight of land. This did not worry us, as we had got our approximate position, and when we estimated that our proposed berth had been reached, dumped the anchor. Personally, I don't like fog, and though I had then been some twenty hours out of bed, I remained on deck.

Not so my crew, consisting of "Filth" and "The Cat." They promptly turned in to try to snatch a little rest, prior to the start of the race three hours later.

They had not been below for more than a few minutes when a sailing yacht emerged from the fog on our starboard beam, and anchored little more than a length north of where we were lying. As she anchored I heard the deep bellow of some large steamer's whistle in the distance.

"What can that chap be doing under way in this fog?" thought I to myself. "I don't like it a bit. She must be in the channel, and there is a strong flood tide running."

So thinking, I took most of the turns of our warp off the bitts, and secured a buoy to the end of the rope, so that we might slip our anchor instantly should necessity arise.

Another bellow close at hand, and directly ahead!

"Better turn out, and come on deck," I called to those below, at the same time casting off all but the last half-turn from the bitts, and keeping the warp in my hand.

Practically at the same moment I saw, high overhead, the topmast of a steamer sticking up through the fog, and a steamer's bow almost on top of the yacht next to us.

Spellbound, I watched that bow, expecting to hear a crash and to see the yacht sink before my eyes. "Filth,"

meantime, had turned out, and also saw what was happening. "The Cat" remained in bunk, evidently thinking that a little rest was for the time being the more important occupation.

The steamer missed the yacht by a hair's breadth, and ran right along her side, at the same time going astern on both her propellers to the uttermost limit of her power. We paid out warp and sheered away, while the other yacht hastily got her anchor and drifted on the tide. The steamer had come to rest, and expecting her to swing round and fall across us, we weighed our kedge and drifted further east.

Through the fog, from the Railway Pier, came a voice; "Come over here, Captain, you are on the north side, among the yachts."

"I can't. I'm ashore," hailed the Captain of the steamer in reply.

"Thank goodness for that!" was the comment of the yachtsmen lying anchored round about. Had the steamer not taken the ground, and thus been held in position, nothing could have saved the yachts, as the steamer would have been carried up by the tide, and must have completely swept the anchorage where the yachts were lying.

As we drifted up on the tide somebody hailed us, and advised us to anchor where we were. This we did, but being dissatisfied with the berth, we soon tried to weigh again. This time the anchor had fouled something, and we could not lift it.

We felt sure that if the steamer got afloat, and attempted to swing in the usual manner with a head rope fast to the pier, her stern would sweep the place where we then lay. Thus thinking, we bent extra ropes to the end of our warp, in case of trouble, for we did not want to lose our kedge. It was well that we did so, for hardly were the knots tied

than we heard the steamer approaching, and saw the head of her mainmast over the fog.

Quickly we veered away on our warp, and sheered off with helm hard aport, only just in time. The fog thinned, and through it we saw the steamer swinging round on the tide, with her head rope fast to the pier.

Right over the spot where our anchor was her hull passed, and we, on the extreme end of our warp, little more than cleared her stern as she swung to the tide.

Had anyone told us that a yacht, lying peacefully in Fleetwood, was liable to be chased round the anchorage by a two-thousand-ton passenger steamer during a fog, we should without hesitation have doubted his veracity—that is to say, prior to having experienced the thing for ourselves. It was a surprise to us that a vessel should attempt to make the pier on the flood tide under such weather conditions, but we supposed that, for some reason or other, her Captain had no choice in the matter. From this you will observe that interesting experiences may occur in even a quiet little place such as Fleetwood.

Without straining my memory unduly, I could go on and on for many more pages, telling true tales of our holiday adventures afloat, but space does not permit; so, with no little regret, I must leave the other yarns unspun for the present.

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